



## Crossing Conceptual Boundaries VI

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*The road to subjective belonging: the travels, travails and realisation of a narrative PhD*

Siyanda Ndlovu Memorial Lecture<sup>1</sup>

Nicola Samson

Using my thesis as illustration, this paper focuses on the process of a narrative-based PhD, offering a retrospective reflection on the figurative journey, and mulling on the people, the support, the learning, the theorising, the writing, the ups and the downs. The paper is of course entirely partial, it is very much a story of my process, it does not presume to be the process of a narrative PhD.

As Siyanda was a close PhD friend, it seemed appropriate not merely to give a presentation in his name, but to recall the powerful and important presence he had for me. So, I first met Siyanda in November 2007.

<sup>1</sup> **Siyanda Ndlovu** drowned in South Africa on April 5th 2010. To honour him, and the critical and creative spirit of his work, the Centre for Narrative Research at UEL has initiated the Siyanda Ndlovu Memorial Lecture, to be given by a recently graduated PhD student at the beginning of our annual graduate conference, 'to think is to experiment.'  
(<http://www.uel.ac.uk/cnr/seminar/lectures/>)



He was at the Centre for Narrative Research (CNR) on his first six-month Commonwealth scholarship stay, working on his PhD on 'race' and 'black identity', interviewing black people in Britain; I was in the early days of undertaking a masters degree in life history research at the University of Sussex, long before I had even considered doing a PhD. We both attended CNR's Ruthellen Josselson seminar discussing the hermeneutics of restoration and demystification - which some years later became central to my PhD. Siyanda and I met occasionally at seminars but it was the following year when I began a PhD, and he returned for his second six months at CNR, that our friendship flowered as we found ourselves part of a CNR PhD group. In the following months, that group provided us with crucial sustenance. It was not simply that the social gatherings offered light relief, but that the support was critical in finding our way in the narrative process we had begun.

Siyanda wrote in a book he gave me of the, 'lonely journey we [had] freely chosen'. And, the paradox of the lonely journey in which we were all engaged, was clear.



Robert Bosch: Cerro Torre, Patagonia, Argentina

We were very much on our own, ‘doing our own thing’, seeking our singular holy grails that appeared so far from reach. Our routes were unidentified; we were heading into uncharted territory, but thankfully, at the time, we were doing it together. For it was not only our individual PhDs that seemed fuzzy, sometimes inexplicable, but also our engagement with narrative.

Narrative inquiry can be elusive in relation to definition, approach and application. As I wrote in my thesis, narrative is:

...enriched (and possibly burdened) by the nature of [its] flexibility, fluidity and equivocality; [it has] no strict nor fixed parameters firmly guiding [its] application, providing freedom to follow one’s research and create a path distinctive to its needs; an exciting, exploratory route to take (but which also brings fears and fantasies of failing to ‘do it right’). Andrews et al. introduce their book, *Doing Narrative Research*, by stating that, ‘...narrative research offers no automatic starting or finishing points. [...] Clear accounts of how to analyse the data ... are rare’ (2008, p. 1). Samson 2013, p.39

It was this very point that made our group, and of course CNR generally, so important; an arena where we could discuss our confusions and frustrations, share ideas and pose questions, and where we gained courage from each other to inch forward without clearly mapped routes to guide us. In tackling his interview data, wondering how to make meaning of his transcriptions, Siyanda fervently queried how he was supposed to know whether he was ‘doing it right’. However, in the narrative classes our group attended it was also Siyanda who invariably had the most insightful questions and ideas, challenging us all.

Had he lived, Siyanda would have appreciated hearing Maria Tamboukou’s (2011) opening words to the CNR tenth anniversary conference. For 10 years, she said, ‘... [CNR had] been trying hard not to answer the question of ‘what is narrative?’. She argued that pinning down narrative was ‘futile’ and that it should not be ontologically defined but be allowed to remain an open process ‘about doing’ (Tamboukou, 2011b, pp. 7-8). Her words were salutary and gave succour in encouraging me to continue feeling my way, without knowing quite where it might lead.

From the beginning I had known I wanted to explore subjective belonging through everyday aspects of women’s lives. I was following a topic that I had begun in my undergraduate degree as a very late starter in higher education. I learned that the notion of belonging, which had puzzled me since my own childhood sense of not belonging, was a subject I could study, and it led me from undergraduate to master’s degree and then PhD. I also knew that I wanted to employ narrative, both methodologically, as my epistemological approach for understanding social reality, and as my method (even if I had not in those very early days, quite realised it in those terms). The idea of using my street in North Newham as a multi-ethnic context in which to find interviewees came early in discussion with supervisors. There would be about 14 women both migrant and non-migrant with as wide an age-range as possible. Thus I would deliberately not be focusing on any particular ethnic, nationality, class or age group but would encompass the broadest possible diversity of self-selecting women. Actively engaging in the process of seeking interviewees was harder than I anticipated, not of course for want of knowing where to find them, since they were my neighbours, but precisely because they were my neighbours. This close proximity to my interviewees in some respect troubled me throughout the process of the PhD but thereby also led me to be as ethically caring as I could be in my interpretation of their stories. In the early days of my pilot project my positioning as neighbour seemed most pertinent in attracting those people who agreed to participate. The women who would not be drawn in were largely South Asian who make up a large part of the local population.

I interviewed all the women who agreed to be recorded: An Australian, a British Bengali, a British mixed-heritage Indian Scot, a Chinese Malaysian, five white British women including a Rhodesian, one Scot and one mixed-heritage English French, a Nepali, a Pole, a Trinidadian and a Ugandan. They ranged in age from mid-20s to mid-70s and had lived in the street from just a few months to 30 years; two students, four full-time mothers, five in full- or part-time employment and three retired. I had little idea what stories and experiences of belonging and not belonging would be elicited from these interviews, but I was hoping the meaning of belonging for these women would emerge from them.

My concern was not simply whether people do, or do not belong, but how they belong and how their belonging alters with time, circumstance and experience in the process of their lives. However, I wanted to retain as open an approach to belonging itself and therefore did not concretely define belonging. If asked, I explained my perception as relating to deeply felt attachments to people, groups or places that give meaning, self-assurance and security in people's lives, but I purposefully did not impose a rigid or restrictive characterisation. Rather, I used this explanation as a heuristic device to draw out women's experience of belonging. Specifically I wanted the women's meaning-making to develop from their reflexive considerations in the co-construction of the dialogic interviews (Riessman, 2008). For this reason Josselson's (2004) restorative hermeneutic approach was most apposite for my data analysis, in choosing to present the women's meanings whilst at times also questioning them, therefore also utilising to a lesser extent, her notion of demystification. And hence, I found the more objective structured hermeneutics as proposed for example by Juhasz (2011) following Rosenthal, was unprofitable. My approach was emphatically subjective. While rejecting a positivist definition of belonging to be hypothesised and proven, I was encouraging a phenomenological, unfolding of the women's sense of belonging understood through their own subjectivity.

The narrative process was undoubtedly also a journey for the interviewees themselves. Their reflections on their own lives was often both quite difficult for them but also illuminating. Their own sense of belonging was not a topic many had considered and its articulation was not easy. Samina summed this up when she related to me what she had explained to a relative:

There's a woman Nicola, she lives in this street, she came with her research, it was a PhD, and she was doing research on people's lives, everything and people's feel[ings], the questions she asked me, do I belong to anything, [how] do I feel like? That is the question .. I was so, made me LAUGH but it's nothing to laugh about, it's something to think about. I never thought of this belonging [laugh]. It's a hard question. It's so straightforward, it's so hard to answer.

The women were often exploring issues of belonging they had never previously expressed and the dialogue illustrates how difficult that could be:

I don't know, it's too hard . to explain, honestly. [...] Yeah, it feels I would need few more days for this question [laugh], I'm thinking about it, now I will think about this all the time how important is this.

Agnes

Oh gosh these are really, these are REALLY deep questions aren't they?

Sarah

I think you've unearthed quite a lot [...] you've allowed me to just talk and ramble so we've talked and extracted things that I wouldn't normally have . thought about.

Angelique

Meaning was thus elicited through the reflective self-questioning that a narrative approach both demands and enables; drawn out and articulated through the stories that the women tell of their lives (Andrews et al., 2008; Riessman, 2008; Elliott, 2005). The challenge of narrative confronts us to make sense of ourselves in ways that are not readily available. Subjectivity, as Ludvig argues, becomes explicit through narration (Ludvig, 2006) which, according to Eakin, is not just about the self but is fundamentally part of the self (Eakin, 2008).

Perhaps I should say that I had once or twice met a couple of interviewees before my research but did not really know any of them. As part of my process within the street I invited my interviewees to a small summer garden party.



Whilst some of the women who came had lived in the street many years, most had never before met. Their interest in connecting prompted me impulsively in the winter to suggest we go carol singing in the street, and later still, a few of women spontaneously brought their families and joined my daughter and me as they saw us building a snow-woman in our front garden. Interestingly, as my transcription and analysis proceeded I generally withdrew more into myself. I did not try to avoid my interviewees but neither did I actively seek them out. The more immersed I became in their stories the harder I found it to initiate being part of their lives.

I was continuing to discover the direction of my PhD as I went.



I never felt very secure that I knew where I was going. Apart from uphill. Not least in transcribing 40-plus hours of interviews which was probably the most arduous, challenging, frustrating and often mind-crunchingly-boring process ever.



And yet the transcription process was simultaneously immensely complex and hugely exciting; a consummate meaning-making task. For this was not simply transferring audio into written text, but engagement in a critical interpretative act. How, for example, I should represent spoken words, with or without pauses, their ums and errs, and repetitions (Samuel, 1998), and if, in a content led analysis, my words should be included, were both crucial questions in how the dialogue might eventually be understood. My interview questions were themed and the transcripts therefore provided a first level of coding. A distillation process using computer documents, but no coding software, began to clarify similarities and differences in the women's experiences. The transcribing was a form of translation and the emergent understandings and insights led to the first palpable ideas of content structure. The substance of my sections and chapters gradually began to evolve.

The analysis was therefore difficult to separate from the transcribing. The connections and disparities that materialised resembled a long, flickering fuse, eventually lighting up the routes to follow. For example I had not specifically planned to write about childhood but opened my interviews asking about childhood, both to glean some family background and to offer hopefully, a gentle way in to the interview. However the distillation process showed that childhood could be pivotal in the thesis for it became clear that there were some very distinctive patterns in

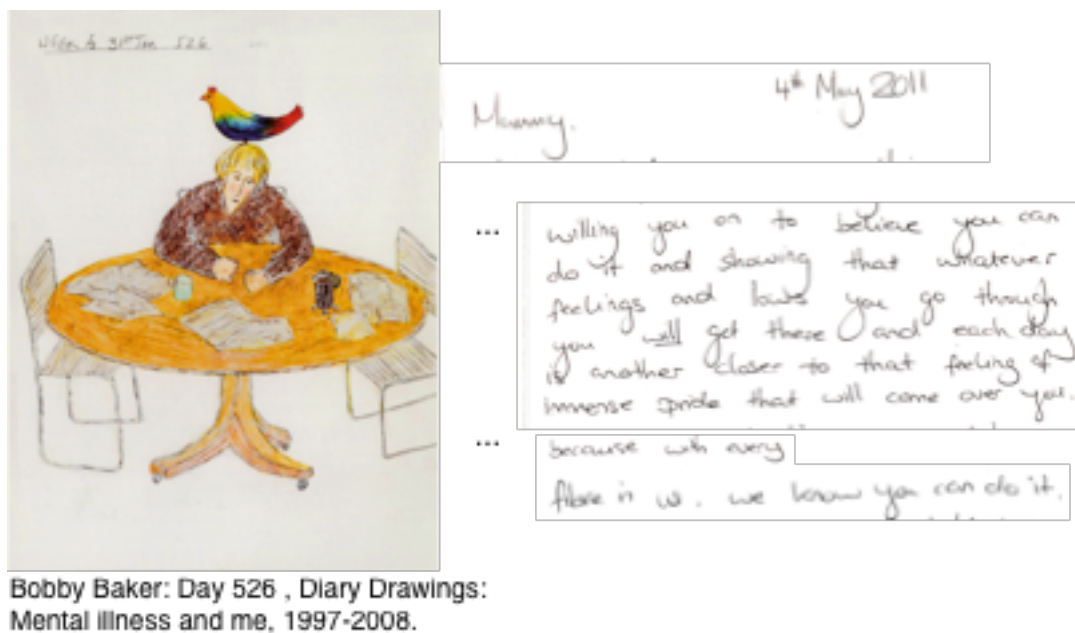


childhood, which I theorised as localities of belonging, and which could be traced to related patterns in adult ethnic belonging. That is, where their experiences of either stable lives with particular people in particular communities, or dislocated belonging in childhood, were threads that appeared as I pored over my transcriptions - I had no idea that I would use my data in this way, or that such findings would appear.

While belonging was fore-fronted in the interview questions within everyday themes such as religion, ethnicity, motherhood and food, it was only through the different stages of dialogic co-construction, transcription and analysis that meaning began to emerge organically and to shape the content and structure of the chapters. Of course I had a chapter plan that was formed in the earliest stages of the PHD. In those early days I looked on this structure askance, not really knowing what it meant or would be. It appeared to loom over me, creating rising fear that I would never be able to actualise it.

As such, throughout my PhD there was some sense of living in parallel universes - one in which deep down I instinctively knew this was a good way to go, I was doing something interesting and maybe important; and another, where I seemed to have no understanding of what I was doing - often feeling great fear, inability and inadequacy. What my PhD friends, supervisors and family all saw in me, was difficult for me to comprehend, but their encouragement and support were crucial.

An example of such support is the card below given to me by my daughter, hilarious because I would sit at our round wooden kitchen table surrounded by coffee pot and papers. And while I never had a rooster on my head, I often had our cat, nicknamed Chicken, sitting on my shoulders!



Fundamentally this narrative project was led by my data. It was only at the end of the whole process that I realised where the journey had led, and where I had arrived. Like a jigsaw puzzle, it is only once the pieces have been fitted together that one can see the whole picture.

Some of the significant findings that emerged from this process include:

- The concept of localities of belonging, that is, the particular people in particular communities that can create a sense of belonging.
- The central importance of performativity in everyday subjective belonging, and in the differentiation of belonging from identification.
- The distinction between place-based and non-place-based belonging.
- The crucial role of intersectionality in understanding the women's belonging through their varying social locations.

And finally, in conclusion I stated that it was the women's positionalities through time, embedded in their performative emotional attachments, and articulated through the narrative meaning they made of their experiences as they reflected upon them, that enabled an understanding of their sense of belonging.

Though it took me five years, I completed my PhD while sadly, Siyanda died a few months before submitting his. However I am so delighted to be able to say that Siyanda's thesis was submitted by his supervisors, Jill Bradbury, now of the University of Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, and Corinne Squire of CNR, and that Siyanda posthumously graduated in April 2013, eight months before me.



It should be noted that I have created a 'mock-up' cover for Siyanda's thesis for the purposes of this paper.



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*Mediating between Social-Economic Structuring and Urban Formation.  
A Discourse Theory of Transformation and Change of the City's Social Realm.*

Antonio Desiderio

*Introduction*

This paper explores the possibility for a theory of social-economic and urban transformation and change to explain how the relation between these dimensions of the social realm works in cities. In other words, how the dynamics of transformation and change in the former enact processes of transformation and change in the latter and vice versa. The focus of this work is the city. As I will explain, some of the most prominent scholars (Saskia Sassen, Henri Lefebvre, David Harvey) interpret cities as being shaped by impersonal, hence unquestionable, social-economic forces. In this way, a separation is created between the urban realm and the social-economic sphere. They are treated as abstract dimensions that operate on two different levels (the local and the national-global) and, still, are characterised by a relationship of univocal influence according to which the social-economic determines the urban. Once a relationship of this sort is established, the possibility to theoretically envision, hence practically enact, processes of transformation and change is frozen.

The theoretical model I discuss in these pages is aimed at loosening the rigidities implied by such visions of cities and at envisioning the relation between the urban and the social-economic in more flexible and dynamic terms – the urban and the social economic being distinct but not separate spheres that imply and influence each other. In so doing, the model attempts to unlock the possibility to understand change – whether change is interpreted in terms of the internal

transformation of an existing urban, social and economic order (say, capitalism) or in terms of questioning such an order. The hypothesis is that processes of transformation and change are not the outcome of impersonal and anarchic forces, but are based on social agency. This necessitates, I believe, a level of mediation between the social-economic and the urban that I call *discourse as site for social-political action*.

The work articulates in two sections. Section 1 is propaedeutical to the discussion in section 2, which addresses the possibility for a discursive theory of urban and social-economic transformation and change. In the first part I discuss the work of some of the most prominent urban theorists such as Saskia Sassen, David Harvey and Henri Lefebvre. It is argued that these authors rely on a vertical and hierarchical understanding of the relation between the social-economic and the urban that is not adequate to explain change as they expunge social agency from the social process. It is also argued that such an approach has the effect of separating the social-economic and the urban in two different spheres; which become impersonal subjects with intrinsic characteristics to be objectively observed. Here it lies what I call, drawing on Foucault (1989, 1994), the tension between *subjectivisation* and *de-subjectivisation*.

The tension between *subjectivisation* and *de-subjectivisation* is addressed in terms of *power*. Starting from Michele Foucault's theory of power (1994), urban space, the city and the social realm are regarded as social constructions made of a complex of power relations, orders of truth and systems of knowledge. However, Foucault's transformation of power into a structural order that determines everything that occurs in the social realm, immobilises the social process into an inescapable base-superstructure system, and freezes the possibility for transformation and change. The solution to this is seen in Hannah Arendt's theory of power, politics and democracy. According to Hannah Arendt, power is the precondition for political action, which is the site for the action and interaction of different social subjects.

The second part focuses on the possibility for a discourse theory of urban and social-economic transformation and change. Discourse is interpreted as site for social-political action that articulates the relationship between the urban and the social-economic realm. Discourse is seen, in other words, as the space where different sets of worldviews, ideologies, ideas and belief compete to gain hegemony and be turned into 'real' policies to enact processes of transformation and change of the urban and the social-economic.

The paper concludes that since cities, their urban order and social-economic organisation are social construction, there is always in principle the possibility to enact processes of transformation and change to question the *status quo*. Such possibility relies on the willing of social actors to engage in social-political action.

## 1. Sassen, Harvey, Lefebvre: the Abstractness of the Social Process and the Absence of Politics

### 1a. Sassen: the *subjectivisation* of the city and the social process

Saskia Sassen's work on "global cities" questions some of the traditional assumptions about the impact of global financial economy on the social order of such cities. Sassen emphasises the tensions, contradictions and multifaceted nature of the global city's social-economic organisation. The first tension is that between *dispersal* and *concentration*, that is, the geographic dispersal of manufacturing on one side, and the centralisation of the functions of control and management required by the rise of a service-led economy on the other. The second tension is that between major cities and nation states: the growth of the former does not correspond to the growth of the latter and there is often a pronounced gap between leading cities and other prominent cities in the same country. A third tension regards social polarisation: the surge in high-income jobs and

urban gentrification are accompanied by the surge in low-income jobs and low income urban areas (2001).

Sassen envisions the production and reproduction of the social and economic order of global cities as a *process* made of different forces operating on different levels. Finance is just one of these forces and comprises of a wide range of jobs – rather than just of highly complex activities (2001: 331). What is more, the changes it determines in terms of economic and social organisation, urban configuration, and relations between the local and the national, are not interpreted as remnants of past eras, but as intrinsic to the development of capitalism itself.

From the epistemological perspective of this paper (a social constructionism according to which the urban, social and economic organisation of cities is a social-discursive construction), the weakness of Sassen's work in terms of its capacity to envision a model of social-economic development to challenge the patterns of global financial capitalism, is the transformation of these various trajectories into impersonal processes that articulate the functioning of what becomes an independent subject itself: the global city. Social agents, the processes of policy and decision-making and the complex of worldviews, ideologies, ideas, beliefs and interests on which such decisions are based are put in the background, or treated as superstructural elements. The tension and the reciprocal implication between the *subjectivisation* (the transformation of the city into a self-sustained entity to be objectively observed) and the *de-subjectivisation* of the city (the fact of being considered apart from human agency and specific systems of truth and knowledge) (Foucault: 1989a, 1989b, 1994) produces, I believe, the effect of making it depend on one single trajectory (financial services) – while reinforcing the dominant representation of financial capitalism as necessary and unquestionable. To put it differently, the lack of a discursive level to articulate the relation between the dynamics of urban formation and the processes of social-economic transformation, and to explain how the worldviews, ideologies, ideas, beliefs and interests of various social actors are turned into 'real' policies; such a neglect of the role of discourse as site for social-political action somehow leads to a cause-effect relationship between the social-economic and the urban realm of cities. A cause-effect approach to the relationships between the dynamics of urban formation and the process of social-economic structuring of cities separates, rather than relating them, and establishes the dependence of the latter on the former. As I explain in the second part of the paper, when it comes to cities it is not possible to establish a clear distinction between 'what is urban' and 'what is social-economic'; as the urban and the social-economic imply each other. Cause-effect analyses, I think, tell only a part of the story; and need to be integrated with a more dynamic approach to take into account the intricacies and complexities of the relationship between the urban and the social-economic.

#### 1b. David Harvey: *subjectivisation* in the dynamics of spatialisation of capital

The same tension between *subjectivisation* and *de-subjectivisation* characterises David Harvey's analysis of capitalism and its dynamics of spatialisation and urbanisation (2006a). Urban space is, according to Harvey, where capital is structured through processes of accumulation and over-accumulation, so that the growth of capital corresponds to its spatial expansion. Economic crises, Harvey explains, happen anytime phases of over-accumulation of capital occur. This can happen either in the form of, say, unemployment, or inflation, or excess of unwanted assets on the stock markets (ibid.). Over-accumulation is also a way for multinational corporations to gain more favourable policies in terms of deregulation and taxation from central governments. In such cases, corporations threaten central governments to relocate pieces of their productive activities in countries with low regulation and labour costs, so as to engender over accumulation of workforce (unemployment). In general terms, phases of over-accumulation of capital are overcome and dynamics of accumulation recovered by the creation of new investment opportunities, as in the case of urban regeneration processes or war.

According to Harvey, the city is a complex of artefacts, spatial configurations, institutional arrangements, legal forms, political and administrative systems and hierarchies of power, which in a classbound society necessarily acquire a class content. Such class content and the underpinning social relations of power also affect the construction of the inhabitants' conscious; that is, their perception of the urban and the knowledge of what urban means (2001: 350). For "under capitalism, it is the broad range of class practices connected to the circulation of capital, the reproduction of labor power and class relations, and the need to control labor power, that remains hegemonic" (349). Although the emphasis that Harvey puts on social relations of power as providing the urban with meaning opens up the possibility for transformative practices (for the notion of urban can in principle be filled with different meanings as social relations of power change), social relations of power become a structural element of society that reproduces an economic base. This fact raises the following question: if over-determining economic forces and structures of power relations engender urban and spatial configurations with no mediation between the former and the latter, how are processes of transformation and change possible? And how are impersonal economic forces and structures of power relations reflected in urban and spatial configurations?

One of the consequences of interpreting the relations between the social-economic and the urban realm in terms of a base-superstructure dynamic is that such an interpretation actually separates rather than relating them. The absence of any mediation in the relation between the social-economic and the urban does not in fact imply exchange (exchange necessarily requires the existence of a medium) but the passive dependence of the latter on the former. Strictly related to that (as I explained in relation to Sassen's work) is *subjectivisation*: the transformation of the social-economic configurations and the urban organisation of cities into *subjects* that can be *objectively* known. Human agency and politics are themselves reduced to superstructural elements whose only *raison d'être* is to pave the way to capital's interests. The absence of a level of mediation between the social-economic and the urban which would also acknowledge social actors a certain degree of independence and autonomy, does not only preclude the possibility to understand how transformation and change as contestation of the *status quo* may occur; it also precludes the possibility to explain how the reproduction of impersonal economic structures in the form of equally impersonal urban and spatial configurations works.

#### 1.c Henri Lefebvre: the absence of a medium between social-economic structures and the processes of space production

Henri Lefebvre emphasises the importance of mediation as a way of understating the dynamics of space production and of challenging epistemology's transformation of space into an abstract object. According to Lefebvre, space has since Descartes been reduced to a "mental thing" completely detached from its social nature (1991: 3). Epistemology has enveloped the social into the mental with no mediation between them. Knowledge, he adds, can only "be expected to reproduce and expound the process of production" (36). It can only work, in other words, *ex post*. Such a view, however, leads to a different kind of abstraction from what Lefebvre sees in epistemology. Discourse, I believe, cannot be limited to the re-production of an existing space. Discursive interaction in the form of communication between different social actors (institutions, associations, political parties, local communities, entrepreneurs, companies, corporations, local and national government, governmental and non governmental agencies, etc.) about the form, functions, uses and ownership of space comes before space is physically constructed. Discourse constitutes the site where different sets of worldviews, ideologies, ideas, beliefs and interests compete to gain social-political consent and hegemony, and then to be turned into real policies and politics of space. It constitutes, to put it simply, the preconditions for space production. To jump from social-economic structures to urban space means to enclose

the relationship between them within a base-superstructure dichotomy, where the urban becomes the passive receiver of the social-economic. In a different way from epistemology, Lefebvre expunges mediation from the process of space production. In so doing, he also expunges change (in terms of both the creation of an alternative order and of the internal transformation of an existing system) from the social process. For it is through social-political action (discourse is the site for such an action) that different social, economic, political and cultural agendas become hegemonic.

Lefebvre interprets the process of space production on the basis of the teleological progression from *absolute space* (civic and religious), to *historical space* (the space of accumulation of knowledge, technology, wealth, etc.), to *abstract space*, or the space of capitalism, “founded in the vast network of banks, business centres and major productive entities, as also on motorways, airports and information lattices”) (p. 53). In accordance with such a Marxist view of the social process, Lefebvre argues that abstract space itself bears the elements to contest and transform it into what he calls *differential space*, that is, a space fostering differences and contrasting the tendency towards homogeneity. However, to establish a cause-effect relationship between the social-economic and the urban is to deny in principle the possibility (that Lefebvre himself sustains) for urban practices to enact change in the social-economic order of cities. We need therefore to think of a level of mediation to articulate in a dynamic and non-hierarchical way the relation between the social-economic and the urban. According to the model I propose in these pages, such a level of mediation (*discourse as site for social-political action*) constitutes the space for self-conscious social agents to act and enact processes of transformation and change.

#### 1c. Foucault: the Disempowerment of Power and the Disappearance of the Subject

The relevance of Foucault’s theory of power to this work lies in his focus on the subjectivisation of the object of knowledge. According to Foucault, the object of knowledge does not exist *per se*, but is the product of specific epistemological orders. Such epistemological orders are made of the power relations between institutions, social agents, disciplines, and systems of norms, rules and classification that together form a specific discourse (1989a: 49-52). To turn an object of knowledge into a unitary subject to be ‘objectively’ observed implies its de-subjectivisation; that is, the idea that it exists apart from the discourse that provides it with meaning. Foucault explains that there is nothing fundamental in society (1994). There is no building or space that is able to engender liberation or oppression by its mere physical, spatial or functional configuration; and the same is true for laws and institutions. In other words, liberty and oppression are not intrinsic qualities of building, spaces, laws and institutions. They are practices. They only exist as long as they are exercised, and as long as the intentions of architects, planners and lawmakers coincide with the real practice of people in the exercise of their freedom” (1994: 354-355).

The implication of this for a theory of urban transformation and change is what I call *de-spatialisation*. In the works that have been considered so far (Sassen, Harvey and Lefebvre) space is envisioned as an object to be objectively observed, measured and analysed. Space is, in other words, *subjectivised*, and so are the processes and the dynamics that shape it. An example of this is the notion of global city. The global city has become like a sort of ‘metaphysical’ entity, which is characterised by specific features (urban-architectural form, spatial order, economic structure and social organisations). It is instead my belief that London and New York, to make an example, are not global cities because they *are* global cities, but because a very specific vision of the city (with the underpinning complex of worldviews, ideologies, ideas, beliefs and interests) has at some point become dominant. What I say is that in order to understand urban space, we need to go beyond the description of its urban-architectural form, spatial order, economic structure and social organisation to the very preconditions for its formation. Such preconditions lie, I believe,

in discourse as social-political action; which is where different sets of worldviews, ideologies, ideas, beliefs and interests compete with each other to become hegemonic and be turned into real policies and politics for the city.

Visions of the city certainly imply social relations of power. However, in order to avoid deterministic interpretations of the social order (structures of power relations determining a consequent urban, social and economic development) and theoretically allow transformation and change, power needs to be placed at the level of discourse as site for social-political action and interaction between different social actors.

According to Foucault (1994) power can only be exerted over free subjects, as it implies the right for individuals to accept or contest it. Differently from violence, which is an act of coercion, power entails freedom (1994: 342). While this fact entails a certain degree of unpredictability in the social process, Foucault himself freezes the social process by placing discourse and power relations at a structural level. In this way, dynamics of transformation and change come to depend on structures of power relations, and the social process is immobilised within an inescapable cause-effect dynamic. If everything that occurs in the social realm is the 'product' of systems of power relations, and if the categories framing individuals' thought, the concepts they make use of and the very language they speak pre-exist them, then transformation and change are impossible; for transformation and change imply the existence of free and conscious individuals. In Foucault's theory the subject disappears and power is disempowered.

#### 1.d. Arendt: the Re-empowerment of Power and the Reappearance of the Subject and Politics

The solution to this is Hannah Arendt's notion of power as the realm of politics, hence social-political action. Hannah Arendt questions the idea of the 1960s and 1970s Left that the social world is the product of a rigid base-superstructure relation that can only be broken by means of violence. Although none of the authors I have mentioned so far refer to or postulate violence as a solution to capitalism's 'social wrongs', the 'for grantedness' of the structure-superstructure relationship that shapes their theoretical models leaves no room for any other solution but subjugation or violence to the 'irresistible' structuring capacity of economic forces.

Power is for Hannah Arendt the power to act. It is only potential and relies upon its actualisation (1998: 201). It therefore implies freedom. Freedom to question the *status quo*, to deny consent to those who are in power, and even to renounce the power to act. Power requires, to put it simply, legitimacy and legitimation. Neither of them are absolute. As consent, legitimacy and legitimation disappear, power in fact vanishes. Violence, on the other hand, is an act of imposition upon others by physical threat and deterrence (beating, killing, war, genocide, etc.). It does not need recognition and consensus and is employed to avoid the unpredictability of politics. Violence can surely destroy power. But a regime based on violence is unstable. As it implies the use of sheer strength, a relationship of violence can be reversed as the strength of those whom exert violence is exceeded by the strength of those on whom violence is exerted (1970: 56). However, Hannah Arendt explains, even a form of domination like slavery cannot be based on mere coercion, as it needs the support of the community of masters to be effective. (50).

Since power needs consent, it implies plurality: the precondition for politics and democracy. Politics is in fact the coming together of different subjects from different perspectives. Without the play of differences between equals, there is no politics, hence no democracy. This does not mean that even a tyrannical regime allows some degree of democracy, but that, as long as human beings with their differences exist, there is always the possibility for transformation and change. Here the relevance of Arendt's theory of power to the issue of social-economic and urban change of cities lies. Once power becomes the realm of social-political



action and of its unpredictable outcomes (1998:178), the urban ceases to be a dependent variable of the social-economic, and transformation and change of a dominant order can be both theoretically envisioned and practically achieved. The possibility for man to act, hence to engage in political action, implies in fact that whatever the social-economic structure, the power relations, the spatial order, the system of knowledge and truth, transformations and changes which question and challenge the *status quo* are always possible. From an Arendtian perspective, I therefore conceive of discourse in terms of site for social-political action, which articulates in a dynamic and non-hierarchical way the relationship between the processes of social-economic structuring and of urban formation of cities. Conversely, to interpret the relationship between the social-economic and the urban on the basis of a cause-effect dynamic and to expunge social action from the social process means that: 1) the social order should be accepted as unquestionable and unchangeable; 2) not only critical thinking but also politics is pointless and better be reduced to a matter of bureaucratic organization; 2) violence is the only means to interrupt such an automatic processes (1970: 30).

Throughout this section we discussed how cause-effect analyses of the relationship between dynamics of social-economic structuring and urban formation cannot adequately account for the processes of transformation and change of cities. Such analyses in fact ignore social action and regard the forces that operate in the societal world as impersonal. This fact leads to a separation between the social-economic and the urban and to a sort of dependency of the latter upon the former. Such a deterministic view of the social process freezes the dynamic of transformation and change; whether change is interpreted in terms of questioning the *status quo* or of the internal mutation of an existing social-economic order (say, capitalism).

One of the possible implications of such a way of looking at cities is of accepting the dominant representation of the forces shaping society as necessary and unquestionable. The risk is to see politics, which is the space for social agents to act, as pointless and to accept its reduction to a matter of bureaucratic management of society. If we are to understand how the relations between the social-economic organisation and the urban order of cities work, we need to conceive of the existence of a level of mediation between them. I call this level *discourse as site for social-political action*. There is, in principle, a very simple reason for this. It is not possible for two or more individuals to establish a relation without them using any sort of written, spoken, visual or audio language. In the public realm language assumes a political character, as it relates to the construction of the *polis*. It becomes *speech* as a form of (social-political) *action*. Secondly, as to maintain the existence of such a level of mediation entails the existence of an element of unpredictability in the construction of consent and hegemony; hence the possibility for transformation and change in the sense of questioning and contesting dominant orders.

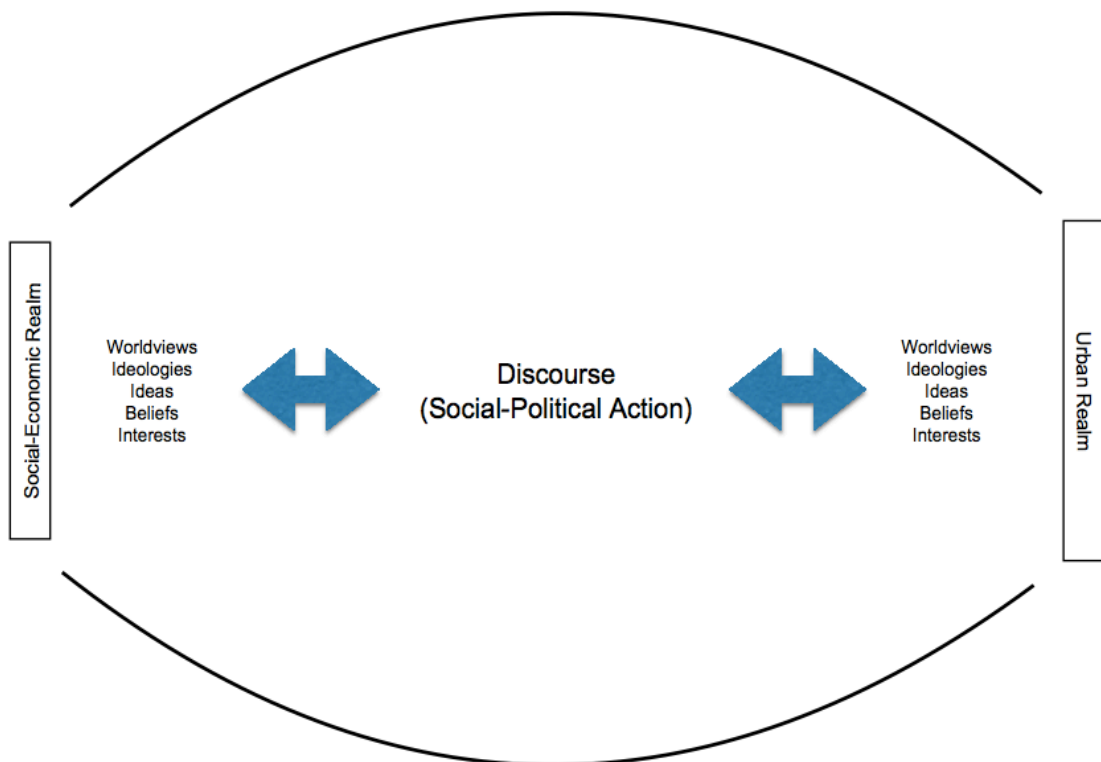
## 2. A Discourse Theory of Urban and Social-Economic Change

As we discussed in the previous section, to ignore the active role that social agents play in the processes of social-economic structuring and urban formation of cities means to envision the relation between them in hierarchical and vertical terms. This fact has important implications. The first of such implications is theoretical. If we accept the idea that impersonal and anarchic forces engender a consequent urban order, there is no possibility to conceive of the possibility for transformation and change: the subject is imprisoned within an inescapable system and is turned into the passive and ‘unconscious’ receiver of forces that cannot be questioned and contested. I am not just referring to transformation and change in terms of contestation of *status quo*; but also to the internal processes of transformation and change of an existing social, political, economical and cultural order (like for example capitalism). Even in this case it would be hard to understand how an impersonal social-economic structure might itself, without an active human agency, produce a specific urban order. The second implication is practical. The theoretical

dismissal of the idea of a free subject entails in fact its dismissal on the level of political practice. In a system where there is no active role for social agents to play, not only critical thinking and politics would become pointless, but democracy itself would well be replaced by bureaucracy. Bureaucracy, for Hannah Arendt, “is the form of government in which everybody is deprived of political freedom, of the power to act; for the rule by Nobody is not no-rule, and where all are equally powerless we have a tyranny without a tyrant” (1970: 81).

Therefore, to reflect upon how to conceptualise the processes of social, economic and urban change of cities and which is the role that social agents play is not a mere intellectual exercise, as it answers the need to understand current processes of political disempowerment of citizens and democratic institutions. As I discuss elsewhere in relation to the official discourse of London 2012 Olympics, the dominant representation of global financial capitalism as a necessary and unquestionable force is reflected in both the transformation of East London (site for the Olympic Park) into an area for tourism, leisure and corporate investments (Desiderio, 2013); and the construction of a legal framework that weakens the mechanisms of democratic control over and participation to the processes of decision-making (Desiderio, 2014).

It is my belief that there is in principle no systemic dominance of the social-economic over the urban, as the social-economic and the urban are not distinct spheres, but together take part in the formation of the wider social realm. The relation between them is therefore no longer envisioned in terms of verticality and hierarchy (a top-down movement from the social-economic to the urban) but in terms of horizontality and reciprocity – as the diagram below shows. Such reciprocity can only be achieved through an intermediate level of discursive interaction to articulate the relationship between the social-economic and the urban. For to think of interaction, that is exchange of information in the social realm, we need to think of the existence of some sort of medium to make such exchange possible.



The diagram I showed above is just an approximate visualisation of the functioning of the relations between the social-economic structuring and the urban formation processes of cities; and it could not be otherwise. I am aware of the fact that the social realm is too much a complex

matter to be captured in such a way. Any attempt in this direction might result in a too static model to explain the complexities of the social process. However, I think it can be of some use to provide the reader with a model to visualise the kind of interaction between the social-economic and the urban realm that is being discussed in these pages. It is important to bear in mind that the model I am proposing is not a conclusive explanation of the dynamics I am discussing and that it does not have to be read in terms of casual relationships. The relationship between the urban realm, discourse and the social-economic realm is dynamic. The social-economic is reflected in the urban no more than the urban is reflected in the social-economic; while discourse receives information from the urban and the social-economic and translates them into processes of urban formation and social-economic structuring. However, whether the 'source' of change is the urban or the social-economic, communication between them cannot occur without the intermediate level *discourse as site for social-political action*.

To say that the urban and the social-economic are complementary realms in cities does not mean in any way that they are the same. The social-economic is in the urban but it is not the urban; and the urban is in the social-economic but it is not the social-economic. They both imply each other and equally affect each other, without the one being reduced to or being determined by the other. It would not even be correct to say that they are specular, as reflection still entails immediacy. Nor it would be right to say that they are like two different sides of the same coin, since a co-presence of this kind does not imply any reciprocity and may still entail distinctness. Instead of that, it can be argued that the social-economic and the urban are similar without being the same, and are different without being distinct. They resemble, for example, the human brain. Roughly speaking, this is formed by two hemispheres that are connected by a bundle of neural nerves and are characterised by no form of dominance of the one upon the other. In a similar manner, the social-economic and the urban constitute two different (but not separate) dimensions of the same realm – the city's social reality – that communicate through discourse as site for social-political action.

Another implication of a horizontal vision of the relation between the social-economic and the urban is that it addresses the inadequacy of the traditional distinction base-superstructure to explain the dynamics of social, economic and urban change. Once we accept the idea that the relation between the social-economic and the urban occurs on a horizontal rather than vertical plane, and that the urban implies the social-economic as much as the social-economic implies the urban, the traditional distinction between a structure (the social-economic) determining a superstructure (the urban) loses its explanatory power. Both the social-economic and the urban then become *structuring* elements of the social realm.

The reason why I do not interpret the social-economic in terms of *structure*, but in terms of *structuring*, and I do not refer to the urban in terms of *order*, but of *formation*, relies on the theoretical and analytical shift from *outcomes* to *processes*, from the *what* to the *how*. In other words, on the shift from the description of the city's urban, social and economic order (which entails subjectivisation in terms of the transformation of the city and the social process into impersonal subjects to be objectively observed; and de-subjectivisation in terms of expunging social agency from the social process) to the analysis of the preconditions for the dynamics of urban formation and structuring. Words such as structure and order entail fixity, while structuring and formation imply dynamism.

But then the question: how does discourse as site for social-political action work in articulating the relationship between processes of urban formation and social-economic structuring of cities? In her work on *discursive institutionalism*, Anna Schmidt explains how social agents internalise structuring elements of society and take them for granted, while, at the same time, consciously distancing themselves from them (2008). This dynamic of 'objectivisation' through the conscious elaboration of worldviews, ideologies, ideas, beliefs and interests,

constitutes, I believe, the precondition for the processes of transformation and change. Yet, the simple existence of consciously processed values does not itself imply enactment in the form of transformation and change. Values are not by themselves transformative, as they still pertain to a pre-political phase. Here the relevance of discourse lies. Politics, as Hannah Arendt explains, is where subjects starting from different perspectives come together in the form of speech and action and compete to gain consent and hegemony in the wider social-political realm (1998). But politics is also the realm of power, and power entails both the power to act and the power to not act. It means, to put it differently, freedom to engage in political action but also freedom to renounce it. Therefore, insofar as subjects embrace their power to act and the values they sustain become hegemonic, transformation and change are possible. Conversely, insofar as subjects renounce their power to act, the values they express remain at a pre-political level and no transformation and change are possible.

What this means is that the worldviews, ideologies, ideas, beliefs and interests of specific social agents need to be turned into social-political action for them to affect the social-economic and the urban. Visions of what the city should look like in terms of architectural and urban form, of what activities its economy should be based on, of which social subjects should be included and/or excluded from the processes of decision and policy-making, of what structures of governance should be created to enact such decisions and policies; such visions depend on the worldviews, ideologies, ideas, beliefs and interests of specific social groups. Once this complex of values becomes the content of social-political action (which includes public debate, discussions, newspaper campaigns, public demonstrations, picketing, conferences, the formation of political parties, movements and associations, election campaigns, etc.) and succeed in becoming dominant and hegemonic, they can be turned into real policies that shape the processes of urban formation and social-economic structuring of cities. This is not only true for ideas that contest the *status quo*, but also for the dynamics of internal transformation of an existing system. Any modification of the social-economic and/or the urban always entails dynamic processes of encounter and collision between different interests and agendas; some of which succeed in becoming hegemonic, some of which do not. For this to happen the existence of free social actors and a space for social-political action is required.

### *Conclusions*

Throughout this paper we discussed how traditional cause-effect analyses of the relations between the social-economic *base* and the urban *superstructure* of cities fail in explaining how dynamics of transformation and change in these two realms occur and how the relationship between them works. It is argued that such rigid theoretical models ‘paralyse’ the social process, with important theoretical to practical consequences.

The dynamics of transformation and change need an intermediate level between the social-economic and the urban to articulate the relation between them. To allow, in other words, the exchange of information between them. Such a level of mediation is called *discourse as site for social-political action*. Whether we think of transformation and change in terms of the internal mutation of an existing system or in terms of contestations of the *status quo*, they are never the outcomes of some sort of impersonal and anarchic forces. Processes of transformation and change are always articulated through the agency of conscious human subjects, who act out of specific sets of worldviews, ideologies, ideas, beliefs and interests. These are internalised and at the same time consciously produced and reproduced. Dominant social, economic and urban orders can always be questioned by alternative dynamics of social-economic structuring and urban formation. The precondition for alternative action, however, is action itself, that is to say, the will to make use of political power and engage in political action. Since power means not just the liberty to politically

act but also the liberty to renounce such liberty, the responsibility of both acting and non-acting rests on nothing else but a free, human-based choice.

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### *Bio*

I am in my third year Ph.D at UEL School of Social Sciences (SS). My research is focused on the process of East London urban regeneration. More precisely, on the economic, political and media discourse, and on the discourse of laws, acts, plans and development strategies as precondition for such process. It is my belief that the dynamics of urban, social and economic change in cities are not the result of impersonal and anarchic forces, but the outcome of a social-political action which occurs in discourse. A part of my research is therefore devoted to the construction of a theoretical model to understand the role that discourse as site for social-political action plays in the processes of urban and social-economic change of cities, and how the relationship between the urban and the social-economic realm works.

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## *Posthumanists on the Couch*

Jacob Johanssen

### **1. Introduction**

The US television programme *'My Strange Addiction'* (TLC, 2010) is about ordinary American citizens who exhibit 'strange' behaviours such as eating laxatives, wearing a bunny costume in public, or treating a life-sized doll as a real person. Lori (Episode 1) sleeps with her hair dryer turned on every night. The hair dryer has taken her husband's place in her bed. He has left her because he could not stand the noise. After 01:30 minutes into the programme, she explains how she developed her addiction: 'I was eight years old when the first time I remember sleeping with my blow dryer. I used to share a bed with my older sister Tami and she, one night, turned on this blow dryer. And the sound of it, the warmth of it, just instantly put me to sleep and from that night forward, I was hooked.' (01:30-01:36). Lori is 'very addicted to the heat and the sound.' (09:46-09:47). In short: 'The blow dryer has become a part of who I am.' (09:45). Of course, she wants to change. As with many other reality television programmes, the programme is about a process of conversion and transformation until, finally, Lori is shown having left her blow dryer behind. As part of the show, the participants are seen by experts and encouraged to utter words signifiers that relate to responsibility, will power and agency. Lori expresses, facing the camera: 'I have admitted I have a problem and now it's just about the steps to overcome it.' (17:02-17:06). The exponential increase of reality television in the last decade and in particular shows that focus on a subject's bodily and mental health, have been explained by scholars as phenomena that come with reflexive modernity (Giddens 1991), an advance of psychology and psychoanalysis (Rose 1990) and a neoliberal culture of self-responsibility and self-help (Richards 2007, McRobbie 2009). Our age is saturated with ideas of the therapeutic (Furedi 2004; Richards 2007; Yates 2011; Johanssen 2012). 'Therapy culture' (Furedi 2004) stands for a shift towards public

utterances and displays of sufferance and how they can be overcome. Media, and in particularly reality television, serve as a looking glass for audiences. As they are watching others, supposedly real people, they are in turn observing and watching themselves. Seeing others and their problems helps us make sense of our own. Barry Richards claims that this process can be viewed as therapeutic because television is a platform that can potentially allow us to work through our own problems and anxieties (Richards 2007). The therapeutic implies here that individual problems are addressed, faced and overcome (Richards 2007; Yates 2011; Johanssen 2012). Reality and makeover television are the prime example of the idea that subjects can be transformed into healthier, (more) productive citizens.

The notion of the therapeutic is not only present in popular culture but also in medical and scientific discourses, such as posthumanism. Before shifting the focus on to posthumanism, another angle needs to be included here: medicine. Brown and Webster (2004) describe the history of Western medicine as a shift towards body parts that are being substituted by other body parts or artificially created devices that merge the body with the machine, e.g. a cardiac pacemaker. The body is not only maintained to a healthy state through medical intervention, instead it is pushed to new limits aided by technology:

Today, maintaining the body is a problem of technological apprehension or capture requiring the production of new systems for codification, storage, accessibility and distribution (Brown and Webster 2004, p. 80).

The very future of this maintenance is envisioned by posthumanism. Pushing the boundaries of what the human body can and should be capable of doing to its very limits, has become a growing discourse about the ethics of human transformation through medicine, information and communication technologies, and science more generally. It is particularly medical research that has crossed traditional boundaries between the inner and the outer, external and internal, overthrowing these dichotomies with a promise of possibilities. This has led to 'humans and non-humans' being in 'a constant state of mutual redefinition' (Brown and Webster, 2004, p. 107). This redefinition is attempted by popular culture and posthumanism alike.

There is no single definition of the term 'posthumanism'. The literature on the topic is extensive and the discourse itself is heterogeneous (Pepperell 2003; Miah 2008). I will concentrate in this article<sup>2</sup> on the enthusiasts of posthumanism by referring to exemplary quotes that are about the possibilities of posthumanism. Implications of these positions will be discussed from a psychoanalytic point of view. Finally my critique of posthumanism will be embedded in wider notions of the therapeutic and the Freudian idea of negation. The concept of negation allows me to link reality television with posthumanism. The argument of this article is then that large spheres of the Western culture (of which reality television and posthumanism are two examples) actively negate the unconscious. Freud regards negation as a wilful act of repression. An idea, an image, a thought, etc. is consciously excluded from a way of thinking. I will show how this negation is achieved by examining the discourse of posthumanism and Lori's case.

<sup>2</sup> Fragments of this chapter have previously appeared in '*Cyborg Subjects: Discourses on Digital Culture*' (Johanssen and Rambatan, 2013). It has subsequently been extensively revised.



## 2. Therapeutic Posthumanism

Posthumanist literature is vast and only a small fragment will be discussed here, focusing on a certain aspect of posthumanism: the notion that posthumanism can alter human subjectivity; technology will improve the bodies of posthumans and will ultimately eliminate problems related to physical and mental health.

According to Pepperell (2003) the notion of posthumanism can be envisaged as a triangle. Firstly, posthumanism refers to an age that, in a literal sense of the word, comes after humanism; secondly, it denotes that traditional ways of thinking, mainly by western philosophy, of what the human subject actually is, are being challenged; thirdly, it implies the idea that technology and humans become more and more intertwined. This results in the need of a redefinition of the term 'human'. I will focus on the third part of the triangle in this chapter.

A certain strand of posthumanity (or transhumanity as it is often called) believes that posthumanism might serve as a way of improving our bodies, and our brains more particularly. In that sense, the human is superseded by a 'new' human or cyborg. A key contribution to the critical study of what posthumanism means was made by N. Katherine Hayles (1999). Hayles argued that bodies are being more and more translated into information, digital data and non-matter. The body itself is being reconfigured as something that is not defined by flesh alone. Unlike Fukuyama (2002), whom I will discuss later on, Hayles celebrates the potentials of posthumanism, similarly to Donna Haraway (1985). What counts today as an able, healthy or normal life is being challenged. For Hayles then, posthumanism is about 'bodies losing their boundaries' (Miah, 2008, p. 78). It is about challenging 'what being human means' (Hayles, 1999, p. 285).

The positions that will form the basis of the present chapter are less nuanced and theoretically driven. They do not make use of philosophical theories as the ones discussed so far. Instead they speak of the direct applications of posthumanism, or how a posthuman future could look like. These enthusiastic positions all share the vision that 'genetic engineering, artificial intelligence, robotics and nanotechnology will [...] allow us to conquer disease, eliminate unhappiness, end scarcity and postpone, perhaps indefinitely, death itself.' (Rubin, 2008, p. 137). For instance, we could have a chip implanted into our brain that could 'improve [our] memory' (Caplan, 2006, p. 36). Bostrom outlines further future possibilities:

A massive increase in funding for research to better understand the basic biology of ageing could pay off handsomely if it leads to treatments to intervene in the negative aspects of senescence, allowing men and women to stay healthy and economically productive much longer than is currently possible (Bostrom, 2006, p. 49)

Likewise, science and technology can lead to productive and responsible subjects who can work for longer without being hampered by ageing bodies and slower working brains. Klerkx (2006) summarises the enthusiastic approach held by many posthumanists:

These days, transhumanists take many forms: from nanotech enthusiasts who envision armies of microscopic robots inside our bodies, forever detecting and destroying disease, to head-freezing cryonicists who believe that science will one day revive the dead. But all share a basic belief that would undoubtedly resonate with Metchnikoff: that as technology and medicine advance, humans will live significantly longer and healthier lives while realising greater intellectual and social achievements (Klerkx, 2006, p. 60).

Finally, one of the most prominent advocates of transhumanism and biotechnology, Ray Kurzweil (2005), asks what the consequences will be once 'nonbiological intelligence predominates' (Kurzweil, 2005, p. 201). Kurzweil argues that subjectivity is to a large extent defined by consciousness and future posthumans are also going to be conscious subjects. Kurzweil stresses that technological developments will result in a shift from biological to nonbiological humanity:

A third, and the most compelling, scenario involves the gradual but inexorable progression of humans themselves from biological to nonbiological. That has already started with the benign introduction of devices such as neural implants to ameliorate disabilities and disease. It will progress with the introduction of nanobots in the bloodstream, which will be developed initially for medical and antiaging applications. Later more sophisticated nanobots will interface with our biological neurons to augment our senses, provide virtual and augmented reality from within the nervous system, assist our memories, and provide other routine cognitive tasks. We will then be cyborgs, and from that foothold in our brains, the nonbiological portion of our intelligence will expand its powers exponentially (Kurzweil, 2005, p. 252).

All these quotes testify to a kind of *final* working through. This psychoanalytic term, coined by Freud, refers to the act of rendering problems conscious and talking about them. It moves towards resolving them through therapy. But for psychoanalysis there is not final resolution, as I will discuss later in more detail. Indeed as humans turn into cyborgs, there is no need for any working through in the Freudian sense anymore. The posthumans will, with the help of technology, be more intelligent and able to think in a 'finer' (ibid, 253) way. Humans will have overcome all illnesses and problems thanks to microchips and nanobots. Kevin Warwick (who calls himself the 'first cyborg') speaks about the possibilities of biotechnology in this context:

I feel when somebody has a problem with the way their brain is working, technology directly integrated with the brain, can help, can overcome some problems that people have. [...] Possibly something like schizophrenia in the future. But implants into the brain open up the possibility of enhancing, enhancing the way we think, maybe making sure, you do not eat that chocolate cake that you want. So keeping your body regulated (Warwick, 2010, <http://motherboard.vice.com/read/the-cyborg-kevin-warwick-is-the-worlds-first-human-robot-hybrid>).

It needs to be stressed here that these accounts are not completely unrealistic, nor can be dismissed as irrelevant (Gordijn and Chadwick, 2008). As Webster and Brown (2004) show, there are already highly sophisticated devices in place that regulate and initiate sequences inside the body, such as releasing drug dosages at a given time, or generating oscillating vibrations to stimulate nerves (p. 119). A lot of things are already possible – but apparently not enough. The kind of future and its possibilities that is envisioned in these quotes has itself been debated in the academy and popular culture.

One of the most prominent critiques of posthumanism is Francis Fukuyama (2002). In *'Our Posthuman Future'* he argued that the danger in posthumanism lies within a replacement of humanism. This kind of humanism – ethics, dignity, equality – is replaced by commercial interests that lead to stronger inequality. This idea is already being debated in popular culture in cases such as 'designer babies' or stem cell research (Miah, 2008, p. 73) that can lead to medicine being more and more profit driven. Even though Fukuyama's critique is overall generalising and not nuanced, it makes an important point. Crucially, the above quotes all advocate a level of enhancement 'beyond levels that are considered normal' (Sharon, 2014, p. 58). They highlight the danger of medical technologies that are employed for nonmedical uses. In the case of the 'designer babies' that were mentioned earlier, this means, for instance, that preimplantation genetic diagnosis (PGD) – a technique to screen embryos for serious genetic or life threatening conditions – will increasingly be utilised for 'cosmetic' purposes such as determining a baby's sex (Sharon, 2014, p. 60). These practices have been regarded as new eugenics by some (Habermas, 2003; Sharon, 2014).

Thus, the danger of posthumanism is that potentially what is being regarded as normal can be seen as abnormal in the future. To posthumanists, the desire to 'have that chocolate cake' Kevin Warwick speaks of, needs to be corrected: it needs to be repressed by an implanted chip. This idea of correcting the *desire* for something that is deemed wrong, unhealthy or unproductive is problematic. It leads to questions such as: who has the power to decide what desires count as good or bad? If that power is given over to machines or microchips, who controls them and what happens if something goes wrong? In the next section, I will discuss this desire further by drawing on psychoanalysis.

### 3. Blowing Your Weak Soul Out

We can conclude from the above accounts that they testify of a negation: contemporary society can be described as a society that negates the unconscious to a large extent<sup>3</sup>. In the logic of part of the posthumanist discourse, posthumans have to better humans. And they can only be posthumans only if they have left their unconscious behind. Posthumans/ists dream of a subject that has no strange desires, psychoses, neuroses or even worries. In their logic, we can only enjoy our age of posthumanity if one major characteristic that makes us human is taken from us: a limited, de-centered, uneasy, unclear sense of subjectivity. It is no coincidence then that so many enthusiasts of posthumanism stress 'applied reason' (Rubin, 2008, p. 140) as a dominant idea. In that sense, 'the very goal of the movement is overcoming the constraints of the human, constraints which define the character of our moral world.' (ibid, 154). The workings of the body and brain are to be like those of a computer: durable, efficient, productive, calculable and repeatable.

The reality television narrative of self-help and overcoming and the posthuman narratives of ended sufferance both share a vocabulary that speaks of wishes to eradicate human suffering once and for all. These ideas of the therapeutic are in fundamental opposition to how psychoanalysis understands therapy and the therapeutic. Freud regarded psychoanalysis as a method of reduction of suffering. Psychoanalysis cannot completely transform a patient and bring total happiness. As Freud bluntly put it: '[Happiness] is quite incapable of being realised; all the institutions of the universe are opposed to it' (Freud, 2004, p. 16). Instead, psychoanalysis

<sup>3</sup>They are actually in direct opposition to Hayles' work on posthumanism. She posits that posthumanism is not about 'conscious agency being in control' but about 'distributed cognition' (Hayles 1999, 288).

should function as guidance for patients to achieve ‘common unhappiness’ (Breuer and Freud, 1955, p. 305). The very notion of ‘overcoming’ is rejected by psychoanalytic thinkers. It is never possible to completely overcome your symptoms. In psychoanalytic thinking, mental and physical suffering is often expressed in symptoms: actions or thoughts that are a sign of something beneath a subject’s surface. Suffering is something that needs to be held onto in order to understand it and look for ways to live with it or at least *differently*. As Levine puts it:

The therapist attends to the suffering of the soul, its psycho-pathology. The therapist attends to its suffering, pays attention to it and helps it to show itself, to present itself, to become present. In so doing, the suffering becomes a present, a gift to be treasured. This is hard to hold onto; we want to eliminate the pain, but perhaps the pain is part of the gift – if we could find a way to hold it, a way to be with it and not run away from it (Levine, 2009, p. 26-27).

The two phenomena examined in this article, Lori’s case and posthumanism, imply one thing: we are not to be unhappy! We should not have any mental problems, disorders or concerns. These can be either eradicated by technological inventions or, as in Lori’s case, by simple breathing exercises and by writing a good bye letter to the hair dryer. Our culture then is to some extent unquestionably posthuman, in so far as it negates fundamental aspects of human subjectivity: fears, concerns and above all irrationality. The real (post)human then ‘is achieved by escaping or repressing not just its animal origins in nature, the biological, and the evolutionary, but more generally by transcending the bonds of materiality and embodiment altogether.’ (Wolfe, 2009, p. xv).

Fears and affective moments are all deeply rooted in any subject and partly in her unconscious according to psychoanalytic theory. If, as reality television and posthumanism, suggest our miserable, weak souls can be blown away, be it by technological advancement or just with a blow dryer, what is at stake here? I will explain the psychoanalytic concept of negation in the next section.

#### 4. The Absence

In his 1925 essay ‘*Negation*’, Sigmund Freud describes negation as a conscious denial of certain facts or memories. He calls negation a ‘kind of intellectual acceptance of the repressed’ (Freud 1989, 667). It is an active move towards repression by which something is wilfully excluded from consciousness. As an active process, it makes use of signifiers (signs that relate to the object they describe, e.g. t-r-e-e refer to the object that is called a tree). In negating something, what is negated is often actively uttered by either directly referring to it or by talking about its opposite. This is precisely how the posthuman discourse operates. In speaking of ‘nanobots’, ‘improvements’, ‘health’, ‘productivity’, ‘achievements’, the ‘nonbiological’, ‘augmented reality’, ‘regulation’ or ‘augmentation’ - all taken from the four posthumanism quotes reproduced earlier - the therapeutic functions in reverse. Something that is potentially a matter of anxiety (ageing, unhealthy or bad desires, etc.) is not being addressed but glossed over by potentialities of technology that can alter or stop these anxieties. In a similar manner to the posthumanists, Lori speaks of having ‘overcome’ her addiction to the blow dryer. Both are actively negating the fears of anxieties as signs of imperfection. It is these signifiers that are what Freud calls, the material that is part of negation: ‘With the help of the symbol of negation, thinking frees itself from the restrictions of repression and enriches itself with material that is indispensable for its proper functioning.’ (ibid, 668). The discourses of posthumanism and Lori prove to be therapeutic in so far as they shift the subject’s focus to the bright side of life and enable a justification of negation.

Lori has overcome the blow dryer and does not need to think of it as a symptom or whatever problems lay behind her so-called addiction. Ray Kurzweil and other enthusiasts of posthumanism do not need to think about their neuroses because they have the many aspects of the cyborg to look forward to. Both reality television's discourse and the posthuman discourse imply a state of *not yet*. A state of humanity that is (realistically or unrealistically) envisioned, expected and desired to become total reality in the future.

With negation the question of 'whether something which is in the ego as a presentation can be rediscovered in perception (reality) as well.' (Freud 1989, 668) arises. Freud means here that the person who negates something actively looks for reasons in the social world that verify that negation. In other words, Lori and the posthumanists are *convinced*, or rather have made themselves convinced, that they have or can really overcome the cracks in the human condition. Their signifiers are grounded in external, empirical phenomena. Fundamentally, what is being negated by all the signifiers referenced is the unconscious and the very existence of symptoms. It is useful to bring in Jacques Lacan [1966] (2002) at this point and his notions of the unconscious and the signifier.

Generally symptoms always relate to speech (and vice versa). In symptoms 'speech is driven out of the concrete [symbolic] discourse that orders consciousness' (Lacan 2002, 51). A symptom is a signifier in itself that relates to a repressed or negated signified. Lacan refers to language, or the word as a 'presence made of absence' (ibid, 228). 'Through what becomes embodied only by being the trace of a nothingness and whose medium thus cannot be altered, concepts, in preserving the duration of what passes away, engender things.' (ibid, 228). These sentences are important in order to understand Lacan's conception of language that draws on semiotics. For him, what is important is not the signified, the thing a word relates to but the signifier, the concept, for it always relates to something that is not really there. As Lacan writes in '*The Seminar on the Purloined Letter*': 'For the signifier is a unique unit of being which, by its very nature, is the symbol of but an absence.' (Lacan 2002, 17).

We might return to Lacan at this point and his observation that signifiers can often acquire a completely arbitrary status. Most of the words I have borrowed from the posthumanists above have what Martin Kurthen (2009) has called an 'as-if-status' (Kurthen 2009, p. 33) in relation to posthumanism. 'They only pretend how it *would be* to have certain signifieds. And by only pretending they lose their referential or 'pointing' character [...]' (ibid, italics in original). These signifiers are used in so many different contexts and situations (science, popular culture, medicine, etc.) that they have become uncoupled from their (supposedly) signifieds. In the example of Lori, the signifiers, in this case the hair dryer and also the 'overcoming', relate to something that is not there or that the subject does not know of or cannot articulate or symbolise. The fact that Lori 'sleeps with' the phallic object of the hair dryer is quite striking. Even more striking is the pronouncement that 'The blow dryer has become a part of who I am.' This can be understood via the psychoanalytic concept of identification. 'Identification is not simple imitation but assimilation [...]; it expresses a resemblance and is derived from a common element which remains in the unconscious' (Freud, 1900a, p. 150). Lori's incorporation of the hair dryer into her being makes her posthuman, as she is symbolically merged with the hair dryer. This identification with an object might relate to the loss of another object in Lori's life, her mother for instance, or it might be the substitute for 'a libidinal object-tie' (Freud, 1921c, p. 107). Similarly, the signifiers used by Kurzweil and others, *envision* a reality and the posthumanists are certain that it is going to happen. There is no mention of the unconscious; neither by them, nor by Lori.

'The unconscious is that part of concrete discourse qua transindividual which is not at the subject's disposal in reestablishing the continuity of his conscious discourse.' (ibid, 258), Lacan

writes. Even though the unconscious cannot be uncovered or found so easily, it still leaves traces in the subject and her surroundings: in the body, in archival documents, in the subject's particular language and style, in traditions (ibid, 215). The unconscious is thus the 'others discourse' (ibid, 219) that exists out there. Thus the examples I have referred to show that subjects speak in a certain discourse that is highly influenced by our cultural super-ego. This discourse is about a negation of the unconscious and the idea that it influences human subjectivity is absent from it. 'In determining the scope of what discourse repeats, it prepares the question of what symptoms repeat.' (ibid, 13). The subjects on *'My Strange Addiction'* speak that discourse and in doing so simply repeat their symptoms, their symptoms are projected onto other, less harmful, actions or objects. The posthumanists, I suggest that they do show symptoms, in their pathological look for future salvation of the human body, have turned their symptoms into a hopeful but equally simplistic vision of the perfect, posthuman body.

## 5. Conclusion

This article has argued that in Western societies a specific notion of the therapeutic has entered popular culture and parts of the posthuman discourse. By providing an example from the reality television show *'My Strange Addiction'* and referencing posthumanist thinkers, I have argued that this notion of the therapeutic is very one dimensional. It is about eliminating human suffering, particularly related to mental states, specific feelings or problems that in the posthumanist discourse are related to the brain or the body. I have interpreted this phenomenon as a negation of the unconscious and everyday anxieties subjects face. We have seen through the ideas of Freud and Lacan that this negation is done wilfully and actively but testifies to possible fears held by those negating subjects themselves. As some have pointed out (Sandel, 2007, Sharon, 2014) and as psychoanalysis takes as a given truism: humans are not perfect. Imperfection is part of what makes us human. Slips of memory, aggression, desires for e.g. a chocolate cake, frustration can actually be regarded as the other side of the same coin of compassion, understanding, courage, humour or gratitude (Sharon, 2014, p. 67). So 'there is something authentic about imperfection that makes it meaningful in itself.' (ibid.). Posthumanism should embrace this imperfection.

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## *Cultural Representations and Narratives of Identical Twins*

Mvikeli Ncube

### **Introduction**

This paper is part of a broader project which looks at the experiences of identical twins in Western society and the way in which they account for their identity. The project includes interviews with identical twins. I look at identical twins because among other things, the notion of twins appears to be of psychological interest to many people in Western society. Identical twins played significant role in academic debates, for example, twin studies have prompted psychologists to explain the role and the value of inherited and environmental factors on individual personality traits and behaviours. Numerous and substantial findings have been generated from identical twin studies and these have had an impact not only in the discipline of psychology but other disciplines like medicine and genetics. The study and the understanding of such traits as intelligence, aggression, alcoholism, criminality and schizophrenia have been strongly transformed by ‘evidence’ gathered from identical twin studies. In this paper I particularly focus on films and novels because they appear to be a rich source of twin representations in Western culture. From the interview material I have gathered in the broader project, I realised that I needed to explore and account for cultural resources that the identical

twins were drawing on to make sense of their identity. This paper is meant among other things to provide a socio-cultural analysis context for those interested in doing research on twin's identity or the accounts of their lives. The aims of this paper are: To show how identical twins are represented in western popular culture and to critically discuss the implications and significance of such representations of identical twins and of Western society at large.

The paper seeks to lay out themes that emerge from a broad range of cultural texts sampled from plays, films and novels. I draw on the account of thematic analysis described by Braun and Clarke (2006). I want to provide a rich thematic description of twin representations so that the reader can get a clear sense of predominant twin themes in Western popular culture. Analysis in this paper will not go beyond what is written in the texts. It will focus on how identical twins are represented in films, plays and novels. I will then critically discuss the significance, implications and meanings of those representations of identical twins and Western society at large in the light of other studies.

Culture according to Griffin (2000, p. 17) is to be looked at, 'as traditional and communicated meanings and practices, and focuses on how these meanings and practices are lived individually, how they affect identities and subjectivities.' The paper will briefly outline the concept of representation, and some theory of visual and written fiction and cultural representation. I briefly explore both cultural and social representations because these overlap and affect each other, including through their social effects. I will then focus on the representations of identical twins in three different kinds of text (Western films, plays and novels) before drawing conclusions about possible implications of these representations on our understanding of identical twins and within Western society. In this paper my analysis focuses on novels, plays and films, and have not included other sources that relate in particular to cultural representations of identical twins. While I acknowledge that the cultural representations to be focused on are not limited to identical twins only but can be seen in other closer siblings like brothers and sisters and what are referred to as 'hetero zygotic' twins. I find them to be more prominent, frequent when concerning identical twins. It is important to note that cultural representations are not the only factors that affect how people understand or react to identical twins but other factors count as well, for instance economic and micro-social factors among others.

## **The concept of 'representation'**

'Representation' was defined by Ussher et al. (2000 , p. 87) as 'one of the many social processes by which specific orders are ceaselessly constructed, modified, resisted and reinstated ... they articulate and produce meanings as well as represent a world already meaningful.' Stuart Hall (1997, p. 16) postulated that 'representation' means 'the production of the meaning of the concepts and language which enables us to refer to either the 'real' world of objects, people or events or indeed to imaginary worlds of fictional objects, people and events'. In this account, representation is concerned with the production of meaning through language. According to Hall, without different forms of representations it would be impossible to make meaning of the world we live in. This argument is based on the assertion that meaning depends on the systems of ideas, concepts and pictures which are then used to stand for or represent the world. The images and concepts give us the ability to refer to things which can be inside or outside our minds. Representation works as a system that involves organising, grouping and categorising many concepts and establishing complicated relationships between them. It is on those relationships between things in the real world, those that are real or fictional, the events, objects, people and

the conceptual system which serve as the mental representations that meaning depends on (Hall, 1997). These accounts of representation raise the question of the role of popular fiction.

## **A theory of fiction**

Gottschall (2012) argues that a message sent across through a fictional is more readily received and meets less critique than a nonfiction message based on facts that is designed to persuade people. He argued that when a message comes in a non fictional vehicle loaded with facts, people read as if with their intellectual shields up. Yet if the message comes in the form of fiction people get so absolved into the story and drop their guard thereby allowing themselves to be emotionally moved unconsciously influenced. Hall (1997, p. 340) asserted that the word 'fiction' carries the notion of separation from real life and that may lead to 'dismissal of fiction as harmless entertainment or worse, time wasting money-spinners driven by profit driven entertainment industry.' He argued that there is a circulation between what we read in novels, watch in films and public discourse.

Furthermore, Hall pointed out that there are different genres for written and visual fiction which drive and emphasise particular representations from different angles and these include among others, comedies, horror, documentaries, soap operas, romance, thrillers and sitcoms. Various genres used in films and novels to represent twins paint and emphasize a particular picture about them. This point is important to this study because it makes it possible to analyze cultural representations of identical twins from the perspective of various genres. The different genres employed in written and visual fiction are of great significance to this study because the society and the twins draw from their portrayal to a certain degree and form their understanding of identical twins on such basis. Discourses that circulate in the society about identical twins are likely to impact on how identical twins perform their identities since identity is affected by culture and some of the discourses take their origin from visual and written fiction.

According to Rushdie (1992) films and novels have been widely used across different cultures as vehicles to discuss perceptions of the world. Fleishman (1992) made the point that fictional events we may read about or watch in films take their meaning not in a vacuum but from real communities and are also constructions through use of language and visual symbols under the influence of specific cultural histories and present. For instance, fictional characters in films and literature are sometimes drawn in relation to history, cultures and real people alive or dead so they may relate to actual experiences (Chatman, 1990).

Lothe (2000) noted that different story types derive from different cultures and these take different forms within each cultural frame work ranging from myth to songs. Chatman (1990) remarked that films and novels often make comments on real life issues. Furthermore, according to Lothe (2000), in fiction, be it in film form or in written literature, we see a reflection of what people have experienced, how people have been formed by those experiences and what has happened in the past. Lothe (2000, p. 8) further noted that 'The relationship between narrative prose literature and narrative film thus confirms the point that those narratives which are part of the world around us assume different forms and are expressed in many ways.'

It is crucial to note that identical twins are used in books and films as metaphors for any number of different views which novel writers and film actors want to put across and at times these are not really about the experiences of identical twins but mere representations of what film and novel writers think about identical twins. Hall (1997, p. 83) argued that a documentary film 'is mediated through the perspective of the person making it' for instance the person's own culture may be a mediating factor. The representations I will focus on are portrayals of identical

twins in films and literature because they may relate to a certain degree with actual experiences of identical twins.

## Cultural and social representations

Research indicates that social representations connect an individual with their society and people make use of them to understand common sense aspects of everyday life (Moscovici 2001). They serve the purpose of facilitating and making easy the interaction between members of the society by giving meaning and sense to their world. These social representations have been defined as ‘a set of concepts, statements and explanations originating in daily life in the course of inter- individual communications. They are the equivalent in our society to myth and beliefs systems in traditional societies: they might even be said to be contemporary version of common sense’ (Moscovici, 2001, p. 18). Discourse is said to be the backbone of social representations and there is a circulation between what we read in novels, watch in films and public discourse (Potter and Billig, 1992). It is further asserted that the process of relating narratives allows room for social representations to be changed or created as well as repeated. What is or can be told in a narrative is influenced by the setting from which it is told but both the setting and the story are not independent of the wider social representation. Furthermore it is assumed that people will always check their position in the boundaries of their cultural frame to make sure that whatever they tell in their narratives conforms to it (Murray, 2002). These have a tendency to be socially dynamic because they are created and recreated over and over again as social interaction continues in everyday life. I now want to turn to the representations of films in selected films and novels.

## Themes from films and novels

I examined a broad sample of films, novels and plays from the early sixteenth century to the early twenty-first century over a period of time where identical twins are used as main characters or major themes. The sample deliberately included very old plays, novels and films, of various genres as well as examples of the late twentieth century and twenty first century to show the changes that have been taking place over the years on the cultural representations of identical twins from the late sixteenth century and also to demonstrate the continuity of some very old representations as reflected in recent films and novels I will cite under this sub title. The genre of the play, films and novels considered for or used in this paper include among others thrillers, horror, comedies, crime, erotica, romance, political and mystery. The following list of novels plays and films were accessed initially analysed and considered for use as examples of twin themes. The films I analysed were: *Sister-Sister* (Bass, 1982); *Dead Ringers* (Croneberg, 1988); *Deadly Sibling Rivalry* (Culpepeer, 2011); *Basket Case 1* (Henelotter, 1981); *Basket Case 2* (Henelotter, 1990); *Lies of the Twins* (Hunter, 1991); *The Parent trap* (Swift, 1961) and *Twelfth night or what you will* (Branagh, 2013). The novels I analysed were: *On the Black Hill* (Chatwin, 1996); *Tweedledum and Tweedledee* (Bles, 1967); *Gemini* (Tournier, 1981); *The Solid Mandala* (White, 1966); *Jaroslav Kaczynski Loses His Political Compass* (Puhl, 2011); *The Eighth Wonder of the World* (Christine, 1985); *The Kray Brothers*, *The Image Shattered* (Cabell, 2002) and *Facts About Twins* (Fahy, 2010). Besides the novels and films on this list, I also analysed the story of Esau and Jacob in the *Bible* and Shakespeare’s (1602/2014) play *Twelfth night or what you will*. Shakespeare’s (1602/2014) text is the oldest source in this paper after the old Testament of the Bible and I included it here for three reasons. This is firstly because William Shakespeare played an influential role in the development of Western

literature, and secondly I use his play as an example which expresses the common themes very clearly and emphatically as it features two sets of identical twins. Thirdly, this and other plays of William Shakespeare are still played in theatres today and this makes as much a current play as an old one because of its current continuing role in western culture.

From the above sample I chose specific films, novels and one play to use as examples of twin themes. The selection was made based on the prominence and clarity within the examples of twin themes seen generally across the sample. I specifically focused on themes in films, novels and plays because I wanted to analyse something where the narrative qualities are visual and clearer. The other reason why I choose films, plays and novels is that, unlike television programmes and still images which probably are not as rich and extensive in cultural currency, they are culturally long lived. Looking through the novels, films and the play cited above I noticed that the following themes feature prominently in western culture through novels, plays and films: Identity confusion; failure to separate; jealousy and possessiveness; intimacy and sameness; and rivalry as well as complementary halves. In this study I am not claiming to carry out a systematic analysis of films and novels. Instead I seek to show how identical twins are represented in the Western culture. My analysis of these fictional representations will also, alongside work on social representations, adopt ideas from the work of Braun and Clarke (2006) on 'thematic analyses'. The films and novels are important because popular culture may potentially validate or invalidate particular representations about identical twins. The validated and invalidated representations may have different effects on identical twins as some may draw from identical films and novels to understand themselves. Besides, the way identical twins are represented through films and novels appears to ignore some of their experiences and this will be also seen in some of the films and novels I cite. Bordwell and Thompson (1997) argued that novels and films carry a valuable narrative dimension because they feature the most important elements of a narrative: time, space, plot, cause and effect. I will now focus on the themes.

## Identity confusion

A tendency to impose certain values, identities and a misrepresentation of identical twins through films and novels can be clearly demonstrated in the theme of 'identity confusion'. Films and novels that construct and reflect the theme appear to promote the traditional stereo types which assume that if people are identical twins they should have similar rhyming names and should also be similar in their personalities. This representation appears to undermine the individual differences which identical twins are entitled to like any other person. In the play *Twelfth Night, or what you will* (Shakespeare, 1602/2014) for example both sets of identical twins are given same first names and this not only ties their identity together but it effectively imposes identity confusion and a sense of oneness. Their individuality is further downplayed by a deliberate avoidance of using their second names.

In the play two sets of identical twins of exactly the same age are featured. Two women give birth in the same hotel at the same night and both give birth to male identical twins. The mother of one set being very poor sells her twins to the other woman who is rich and married to a business man so they can be servants to her twins. All sets were depicted in the play as identical not only in physical features but in personalities. Each set shares a similar first name. The names of the twin siblings by a rich woman were Antipholus of Ephesus and Antipholus of Syracuse. The set bought from a poor woman to be servants to Antipholus twins was called Dromio of Ephesus and Dromio of Syracuse. The second names were not used by the twins in their childhood years to deliberately allow room for confusion (Branagh, 2013)

In the film *Lies of the Twins* (Hunter, 1991) there is break way from the cultural stereo type of assumed personality similarities to some extent which is reflected in the play '*Twelfth Night or what you will*' by Shakespeare (1602/2014). Identity confusion is indirectly implied in the film *Lies of the Twins*. However we see elements of that identity confusion being deliberately imposed and promoted again through the similar rhyming names, James and Jonathan. The physical similarity of identical twins is represented and pathologised by depicting it as a tool employed by twins for philandering and other immoral habits. Male identical twins are represented as people who would take advantage of their looks to manipulate woman and enjoy it without any feeling of remorse. The film also indirectly portrays identical twins as people who have some telepathic tendencies; though studies that explored twin telepathy for example Lykken (1982) found no evidence of twin telepathy.

This is a romantic love film featuring a set of male identical twin brothers Jonathan and James McEwen and a woman called Rachel Marks as main figures. Telling the brothers apart is next to impossible; the brothers are literally identical in their physical appearance. Jonathan is so passionate about his job. His girlfriend is hardly able to keep him off his work for a romantic time in their closet. James impersonates his brother on a number of different occasions to get his way to Rachel. He is very adventurous and experiential when it comes to love making. Rachel finds herself in dilemma of making a choice between the two boyfriends. Before coming to the decision point, Rachel meets a lady by the name Sandra Shearer who shares her experience with the McEwen brothers. It happens that ten years ago Sandra found herself in a similar situation. She had dated Jonathan but was later seduced and lured away by James. As a solution to her dilemma, Rachel packs her bags and gets ready to leave town. On her way she passes by James' office at his work place. To her utter surprise she meets both James and Jonathan in the same office. All the three who make up the love triangle are gathered together. Both twin brothers say and maintain that, 'I am Jonathan'. Without verbally communicating about it both twin brothers expect Rachel to point out the actual Jonathan. Rachel stands there totally confused running her eyes from one twin to the other but she simply cannot tell them apart. The twin brothers appear to lose patience and their tempers are rising. They violently push Rachel into a corner and start wrestling with each other. Rachel stands over like a price to be collected by the winner between the brothers. One of the twins, James dies in the fight. Rachel finally comes to a decision that the twin brothers are both incapable of loving any other person except themselves. She bids a farewell to a friend, Elle and leaves for Europe where she hopes to find a job and earn a lot of money (Hunter, 1991).

In the play, *The Twelfth Night or what you will* and the novel *Lies of the twins* the individual identity of identical twins is ignored, dual identity is imposed, identity confusion is also imposed, promoted and made the focus of attention. Identical twins and members of the society drawing from the above play and film may struggle to appreciate the uniqueness and individuality of identical twins because the representation of identical twins in the sources cited undermines individual identity and uniqueness.

## **Failure to separate**

There is a general issue about representations, attachment and separation between siblings that is intensified when the representations are about twins, reading the story of *Papin sisters* from Reader's (2001) version one can tell that this kind of very close relationship where siblings are so close and bonded such that they can hardly stay apart from each other is not exclusively for identical twins as most films and novels would make it appear to be. The French

sisters Christine and Léa popularly known as the *Papin sisters* were not twins but their relationship and way of operating reflected a lot of things that are seen across the novel and the film I cite under this theme and others but it appears western film makers and novel writers turn a blind eye on those aspects of relationship when they are not in identical twins. To mention just a few here, they both worked as maids in various Le Mans homes, they preferred to and always worked together wherever they could, both were extremely reserved, laid back, quiet and retiring young women, who kept themselves to themselves and seemed to be interested in no one else but each other. When they were put in separate prison cells after killing their employers' wife, Christine could not cope with the separation from her sister; she had acute longing for her which caused her extreme distress. Above all, the testimony given during their trial showed that, one of them, Christine was very dominant in that relationship (Reader, 2001)

In the novel *The Solid Mandala* (White, 1966) identical twins are presented as people who 'breathed the same air' an assumption which further undermines and demeans the individual uniqueness of identical twins while imposing and promoting strong sense of sameness and similarity about identical. They are further portrayed and put on the spot as people who are dissatisfied about their lives because of having an identical twin sibling, a representation which appears to single out and pathologise identical twins when there are many other people out there who are more dissatisfied about different aspects of their lives, e.g body weight. They are further presented as people who can be hardly happy in life because they have to work hard most of their adult life to appear different from their twin sibling. Such a portrayal appears to suggest that there is something wrong about similarities between identical twin siblings.

Now when we turn to fictional representations in the writer of the novel *The Solid Mandala* (White, 1966) presents identical twins as two people who are 'stuck together for life against their will'. The twin brothers Waldo and Arthur Brown are presented living together and sharing a bed until they reach an advanced age of seventy. The author described their relationship as one that was so close to an extent that they 'breathed the same air' (White, 1966). The twins live in a street called nowhere and their lives seem to take after the name of the street and go nowhere but circulate within the confines of closed world of twin ship. The twins are always together and walk hand in hand like newlyweds would do and have done so from a tender age up to the old age. Arthur is presented as unwise and subordinate servant of his twin brother Waldo. Arthur is tender, loving and to him the most important thing is maintenance of twin ship. He values and does all he can to ensure and preserve 'oneness and wholeness' with Waldo his co twin. He wanted them as 'one' to relate with others 'outside' (White, 1966).

*Dead Ringers* (Cronenberg, 1988) is a film where identical twins were used as a metaphor for dependency and vulnerability among other things. They are depicted as people who function fully and competently when they function as a pair not individuals. That appears to cultivate a culture about identical twins that says an identical twin is not a complete human being when he or she is alone, he or she needs someone around them to make them a 'fully functioning whole'. In this film we again see the promotion of telepathic superstition, when characters used for identical twins claim that whatever goes into ones' body goes to the other also. This kind of representation fills popular culture with myth and strange beliefs about identical twins resulting distorted perception of identical twins by other people. Another metaphor that identical twins are used for in this film is that of uniformity, for example, both identical twins change names and both feminise their names. In that, individual uniqueness of identical twins is further demeaned while similarity is promoted. Above all, being an identical twin in this film and the novel cited above is portrayed as confinement that those who are born into it face a life time struggle fighting for an escape route.

The film features a set of identical twins, Eliot and Beverly Mantle who as young boys shared a common keen interest in medical science. Their personalities are however remarkably

different. A set of twins is born strangely connected to each other. Beverly claims to lack an independent nervous system but one that functions hand in hand with that of his twin sibling. They both further claim that whatever finds access into the other twins' blood stream also finds its way into the other twin's blood stream as well. The twin brothers prefer to have their names feminised into Bev and Ely. Elliot is reserved but Beverly is outgoing and mixes well with people in social contexts and likes women. The reserved twin falls in love with one of their clients but fails to make advances to the woman because of his reserved and laid back nature. The extrovert brother approaches the woman in the guise of his brother to propose love to the woman on his behalf. In the course of the whole film the twin brother's step into each other's shoes covering up each other's backs (Cronenberg, 1988).

The film and novel I cite here brings me to the conclusion that identical twins are seen or are made to appear in contemporary popular culture like people who are born trapped by their twin ship and they spend most of their adult life trying to break away from the trap. That representation appears pathological because it seems to be suggesting that something is wrong with being an identical twin. Again, I notice that identical twins are represented as incomplete and incompetent individuals who dependent on their identical sibling for competency and wholeness. These kinds of representation might potentially promote a negative view of identical twins in the society. People drawing their understanding of identical twins from such representations might view identical twins as 'parasitic' individuals who lack competency function without assistance. In addition to that, identical twins drawing from such representations may have their confidence and self esteem negatively affected.

### **Jealousy and possessiveness**

In the film *Basket Case 1* (Henenlotter, 1981) one twin sibling is presented as having some strange and unnatural powers. That on its own presents identical twins as 'different from everyone else'; it potentially spreads and promotes particular kinds of representations and stigmas around identical twins. Above all, in this film identical twins are represented as people who are unable to live independent of each other because they are so jealous and possessive of each other. The possessiveness and jealous in the film paints about identical twins a picture which appears to exaggerate the way things can be between identical twin siblings.

The film features a set of twin brothers born joined together. One is called Duane and the other is called Belial Bradley. Belial is also deformed so badly such that his looks are scary and monstrous. After the separation Belial is expected to die but he amazingly survives. He becomes a parasitic twin dependent on his brother who carries him around in a basket case. Later in the film Duane suddenly finds in himself a strong desire to separate from his twin brother and escape from the twin closet. For the first time he gets into a relationship with a woman. She is called Sharon. When Belial finds out about Sharon, he uses his seemingly super human powers to kill Sharon so he and his brother can be together (Henenlotter, 1981).

The novel entitled *Gemini* (Tournier, 1981) begins with a representation of joint identity. It goes on to assert that identical twins live in a world of their own and are very close friends that 'reject othernesses'. Like in the film *Basket case1* cited above, in this novel identical twins are presented as people who are struggling to break away from the trap they were born into. Jealousy and possessiveness are brought in as a tool that stops that from happening. The identical twins who are the main figures in the novel, Jean and Paul are so much identical to an extent that they are both referred collectively as 'Jean -Paul' as if they are a single indivisible unit. Jean views the sperm cell from which they both came from as a 'prison cell'. Tourane (1981) portrays the cell in



question as one that makes and keeps the twins Jean-Paul more similar than different. It is the one that causes such unity between the two 'likes' and keep them from 'otherness'. The relationship of Jean-Paul twins is described by the author as a closed circle, fragile, not flexible, self-sufficient and creating for the twins a little island of their own. Jean-Paul twins are able to effectively communicate with each other in a silent language. Jean, One twin brother longs desperately for experiencing life outside 'the isolated Island of their birth', twin ship. In an effort to achieve this he leaves his twin brother and travels extensively with no particular destination in mind. In the words of Tournier (1981, p. 196) Jean was in search of 'otherness and solitude.' Jean put a lot of effort while away from his brother to maximise their differences by each new experience he had. Back home Paul makes it his task to make sure he gets the cell restored with him and his brother inside, he follows after him (Tournier, 1981).

Looking at the way identical twins are represented in the film and novel cited above, the implication is that potential romantic spouses might have reservations in getting into serious committed relationships with identical twins fearing problems from the other twin who might not be ready or unable to let go of his or her sibling.

### **Intimacy and sameness**

While representations of special bond and similarity in identical twins can serve as a platform where problems of individual identity and constant comparison can emanate and create many other problems, it should be appreciated that everyone needs to be around people who understand them better and for identical twins probably it is their twin sibling because they share a joint common history. Such representations do not only remind identical twins about what they have in each other but they also promote, support and in a way encourage them in the way of life they were born and grew up in.

The novel *Tweedledum and Tweedledee* (Bles, 1967) presents the relationship of the identical twin siblings as closer than that of a married couple. The novel portrays the life style of the twin brothers as ignoring the 'outside world' because they live in their own world. Probably it is such exaggerated representations of identical twins' closeness and intimacy which cause some people to be mythical, superstitious or telepathic in their thinking about identical twins. The author of the novel presents the twin siblings as born three minutes apart, died two minutes apart, both died of heart attack having lived together the rest of their lives. That representation of identical twins appears to paint a picture that everything about identical twins is identical and whatever happens to one happens to the other also (Bles, 1967)

In the novel John and William Bloomfield are identical twin brothers, '*Tweedledum and Tweedledee*' (Bles, 1967). The twins live together all their lives, they are born three minutes apart from each other and both died of heart attacks two minutes apart. The twins are said to be living in a world of their own, fully self-sufficient as a pair, unmindful and impervious to everyone else. The relationship of the Bloomfield's brothers was described as one closer than that of married a married couple. They do not need in their lives any close friends. Their life style ignores the outside world and no one is given a chance to come into their inner circle. James and William are the only children their parents have. Though it is not proven the brothers are believed to be having an incest homosexual relationship between them. The suspicions rise from among other things, their life style which closely identify with what the author calls gay stereo types. The twins die aged 61, it is difficult to tell them apart and the confusion is worsened by the fact that they keep their documents together in one pocket of one leather bag (Bles, 1967)

There is a possibility that people who may use the novel cited for this theme as a reference frame of understanding identical twins may shun them having the impression that they are not sociable because they have no need of forming friendships with anybody else except their twin sibling. Identical twins may find themselves isolated as a result.

## **Sibling Rivalry**

It is important to note that non twin siblings may compete for among other things, praise from parents, and some other things like affection and attention and that may have the effect of rivalry being generated and operating among siblings, this shows that rivalry problems are not exclusively isolated to twin relationships only although western fiction appears to emphasise it mostly on twins.

The identical twin sisters featuring in *Sibling rivalry* (Culpepeer, 2011), Jana and Callie, are bitter and fierce rivals of each other. The fierce rivalry starts from their childhood life. It stays with them and continues to grow until they are mature young woman. They compete with one another and each is trying to prove he or she is the best. In the course foul play is adopted against each other and this brings bad blood between the identical twin sisters. It happens one day in the middle of the journey from a family meeting that the girls find themselves in a hot argument. The argument developed into a strong war of words to an extent that the driver loses control of the car and it veers off the road causing a serious accident. One twin's sibling, Jana is badly hurt and immobilized in the accident. Her rivalry twin sister takes advantage of her state; instead of helping she suffocates her in an attempt to kill and eliminate her and pretend that she died in an accident. After that Callie assumes two identities and roles, that of hers and that of her sister to keep everyone in the dark about her twin sister. No one is noticing or suspicious about anything for a while (Culpepeer, 2011).

This way of representing identical twins can potentially generate and promote an unhealthy competition in identical twins. Some may possibly be encouraged or influenced to prove a point to their sibling. Other than that, the representation may give the society an impression that identical twins can take advantage of their physical similarity to commit serious crimes and get away with it. That impression will cause identical twins to get a negative reaction from the society and be treated with suspicion.

## **Complementary halves**

The film *Sister, Sister* (Bass, 1982) portrays two identical teen age girls taking advantage of their similar physical looks to deceive and achieve goals. This representation can be seen as painting a pathological picture about identical twins and may potentially build mistrust and suspicion around them from members of the society who are non twins. *Sister-Sister* (Bass, 1982) features two identical twin sisters who live their lives as complementary halves. They discover that where one has a weakness the other one has strength. They maximise that advantage by working together as complementary partners to achieve their goals and to overcome their limitations. At school they both have subjects where they are very good and some where they are not doing well. Luckily for them, they realise that with all subjects where one is not good the other is exceptionally good. Taking advantage of their identical looks, they write exams for each other so both can pass all subjects. One specialises in exams where she is good and writes both

hers and the ones for her sister. The other one does the same. Throughout the film the twin sisters work together as a team and they achieve a lot by doing so (Bass, 1982).

Members of the society who may watch and draw their understanding of identical twins from the above film are likely among other things to view identical twins as parasitic individuals who can hardly survive or cope with life challenges on their own as individuals. Other than that, it is possible that employers influenced by this kind of representation might question the authenticity of any qualifications that identical twins may produce when applying for jobs potentially leading to reluctance in hiring them. Above all, identical twins may be influenced and encouraged to some extent to see themselves as incomplete and incompetent without the help and support of their twin sibling.

## Conclusion

This paper presented an analysis of cultural representations on a selection of texts (films, novels and plays). It should be noted that these texts spread over from the early sixteenth to the twenty-first century. They range from the time of William Shakespeare to modern day films and novels. I did not have space in this brief paper to look at the changes of the representations over a long time. Another paper might specifically look at the changes of cultural representations of twins across centuries and the specific ways in which twins are looked at in different genres of films, plays and novels. I would expect these fictional representations to be different in documentaries where identical twins actually produce text by speaking for themselves. It could have been also possible to do an analysis on the different ways in which male and female identical twins are represented but that is not the focus of this paper. Unlike empirical psychological research, this paper did not seek to discover 'facts' about or how twins are but looked at the cultural representations of twins only. These are representations of the Western culture. I expect them to be different to non-Western cultures where oral tradition is used and films and novels are less important. I could have ordered these different fictional representations chronologically but I wanted to show how these different themes run across different texts.

From my interviews with twins, I also know that there are other forms of cultural knowledge which twins draw from which come from psychology which is why in the broader project I include the history of psychological research on identical twins. I have not included that here because of space and have only focused on cultural representations. For future research it would be interesting to also look at the way in which psychological ideas are part of these cultural representations and how older texts like Shakespeare feed into psychological research.

Above all, other than showing that particular themes are being constantly found in different media at different times this paper has provided a socio-cultural analysis context for those interested in doing research on twin's identity or the accounts of their lives.

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## *Border-Crossers: practice-based research and the novel*

Olumide Popoola

### **Border-crossing**

Fiction gives the opportunity to carry one concept and use it somewhere else, imagine places and spaces that do not yet exist, inscribe alternative meanings to situations. The rules of reality do not always apply, and replicability is of no concern. Prose fiction does however, need to *feel* like reality, convince in both deliverance and plot, even in genres like fantasy and science fiction, and mostly writers work their way through questions that concern the human condition. Often novels become reflections, in some regard at least, on and of the time(s), subtly or overtly engaging with contemporary issues.

*Fishing for Naija*, the creative practice-based research project I will be discussing in this paper, seeks to reflect on insider/ outsider narratives. The PhD project itself comprises of a novel, the larger part, and a critical component. As this type of research is driven by the creative practice, the methodology and research design for this project is the immersion in the writing of the novel itself. Estelle Barrett and Barbara Bolt propose in their edited book, *Practice as research: approaches to creative arts enquiry*:

That...artistic practice be viewed as the production of knowledge or philosophy in action... artistic research demonstrates that knowledge is derived from doing and from the senses (2010, p 1.).

The aim is not to give voice to the marginalised, but to uncover 'border-crossing' as a conceptual device in a myriad of ways. The fictional subjects of the novel occupy the urban centres of London and Port Harcourt, crossing national borders, as well as assumptions of what is possible in terms of friendship, gender, sexuality and coming of age in general. Border-crossing functions, practically, as a starting point for the different trajectories explored (research for the novel, contextual theory, examples from literature, creative angles, culture, language, and so on)

from which this project is approached, and which it revolves around. Initially to mirror the fluid nature of identity, assuming that, “identity is a matter of 'becoming' (negotiation, perhaps) as well as 'being' (maintenance, perhaps) (Bromley, 2000, p.9)”, border-crossing evolved as metaphor to focus the theoretical and practical (creative) investigations. It is relevant both to the actual research but to the subtler, underlying themes of the novel and explores what Bromley discusses as

... the concept of a ‘border metaphor’, which advocates the adoption of the viewpoint ‘of people moving in and out of borders constructed around coordinates of difference and power (ibid).

This centring, or decentring, is also to be located within the characters’ voices and their language, as a larger metaphor, relevant to their development and place in society or their environment. In this regard it engages with Trinh T. Minh-ha’s definition of Writing as “an ongoing practice concerned not with inserting a “me” into language, but with creating an opening where the “me” disappears while “I” endlessly come and go” (1989b).

A side note: *on language*.

In this work I will be using the term *queer* rather than homosexual or gay and lesbian, unless referencing a particular work cited or discussed, to honour the original author’s choices. This is to make an attempt to question all forms of normative notions in this context.

*Trans\**, trans with an asterisk, will be used to denote a person not living as the gender they were assigned at birth, a person that is not traditionally cisgender.<sup>4</sup> The star is used to encompass the vast spectrum of identities, and to honour that there is more to non-binary gender than a trans woman or man, for example gender queer, bi-gendered or a-gendered.<sup>5</sup>

I agree in this regard with Rosamond King choices in ‘Re/Presenting Self & Other: Trans Deliverance in Caribbean Texts’. Although she does not use the asterisk she does drop gender. For her “*trans* refers to a broad identity that includes the varieties of strategies people use to choose, inhabit, or express a gender [or possibly none, addition by the author] other than that which society assigns to their body” (2008, p.584).

In *Fishing for Naija* we follow best friends Karl and Abu, both 17, who live in the Kings Cross area of London. Karl, a trans\* person, who uses the pronoun he, is a constant target for the wannabe bad boys of the area, but Abu stands by his side through thick and thin, and has roped the rest of his family in to become a surrogate family, as Karl’s mother is often hospitalised. One day Karl finds a letter from his father in Nigeria and embarks on a turbulent journey there. Meanwhile the 2011 riots break out and the distance tests their friendship to its limits.

The novel gives a contemporary reading (or more precise: writing) of the Yoruba trickster god Eshu, as allegory for the inherent possibility in Yoruba culture for a full acknowledgment of trans\* persons. Eshu, known to trick humanity not for the sake of trickery, but to expel them into new levels of humanity, is the orisha (deity) of the crossroads, who is able to communicate between the divine and earth-bound. Eshu becomes the bridge between context and reality,

<sup>4</sup> Cisgender is a term denoting that a person is living as the gender they were assigned to at birth.

<sup>5</sup> There are of course many more forms of self-definition as Kate Bornstein aptly exclaims. “...there are as many truthful experiences of gender as there are people who think they have gender” (1994, p.8). The etymology of the word trans\* has been discussed in detail by Hugh Ryan (2014) and Cristan Williams (2012-2014).



where language and need meet. Gillian Beer argues that the trickster god affords us to explore what has been excluded from “the grand narrative”. I would echo her claim that “the trickster is a good thought-tool for feminism, a boundary breaker between thought patterns, sexes, species...” (Beer, 2000, p.7), and add that in this context it specifically allows for a queering of our engagement with gender, by using the Yoruba personal pronoun, which is gender neutral.

The term ‘border writing’ itself has been applied especially to Latino/a American literature from the Mexican-American borderland, but has also been used to describe notions of identity and cultural border-crossing in literature and artistic expressions in general. Writers like Gloria Anzaldua (1990, 1999), Ana Castillo (1995), Cherrie Moraga (Anzaldua and Moraga, 1984; Moraga, 1994) and performance artist and writer Guillermo Gomez Pena (1992) can be named here as Chicana/o cultural producers from the US. Equally Vietnamese-American writer and filmmaker Trinh T. Minh-ha (1989), the Turkish-German actress and writer Emine Özdamar (2006), and the Trinidadian Canadian poet and writer Marlene Nourbese Philip (1997) can be included as examples, of my initial investigations, when we look at a wider reader of the term.<sup>6</sup> It is used as a metaphor not only for actual border-crossing but the internal states of negotiation, as Hicks highlights:

Border writing emphasizes the differences in reference codes between two or more cultures. It depicts, therefore, a kind of realism that approaches the experience of border crossers, those who live in a bilingual, bicultural, biconceptual reality (1991, p.xxiv).

This crossing extends from the languages used, often code-switching between the various tongues the writer or artist works and lives with, to creating hybrid forms that defy common literary categories. Edward Said stated that “there is no such thing as a direct experience, or reflection of the world in the language of a text” (1994, p.74). One could argue that there is of course scope and need for trying, as the attempt in itself opens us to new ways of approaching. Anna Livia, the lesbian, feminist writer and linguistic theorist, argues in her book *Pronoun Emy. Literary uses of linguistic Gender* (2001) in favour of writers being concerned with neologistic options. She claims that “the role of literature in introducing, promoting, and popularizing specific words and phrases cannot be dismissed” (p.137).

In *Fishing for Najja*, the protagonist Karl’s journey from the UK to Nigeria, where he goes to seek his father but instead gets entangled in calls for justice in relation to the oil exploration of the Niger Delta, sees Karl facing an engagement with language that addresses the “urban speak” he employs in his daily life in London, and the Nigerian English he finds himself surrounded with in Port Harcourt. Another border-crossing takes place here, documented as Karl’s and his new friend Nakale’s compound English exchanges take shape, urban London English “mingling” with Nigerian English.

Karl experiences Nigeria as the blank canvas, where he can explore his identity without too much gender policing and repercussions, simply because almost no one knows “otherwise”. Karl’s heritage is Yoruba, and while he is looking to connect with his father, Yoruba offers another way of addressing gender, in form of the gender neutral personal pronoun, *ó*, (he, she or it) and *ẹ* (his/ her/ its). The narrator, who is Eshu, the trickster god, choses to tell the story, employing the Yoruba pronoun for Karl, not to disregard the choices he has made for himself, but to connect him with his heritage in a meaningful way, and encompasses the possibility of a

<sup>6</sup> This selection does not give an overview of the overall field but highlights which works were of particular relevance to the author’s investigations.

non-binary way of addressing people. It also draws attention to Karl, to signify the alienation he encounters. The reader is to be slightly un-settled in a narrative that mirrors the concept of identity fluidity. Judith Butler (1990) speaks in particular about gender and its construction and how it establishes itself always in relation to its expression, which in itself is not innate but learned, thus in-stable. The language is in that sense engaging with the concept of inclusivity and gender expression.

Aldon Nielsen (1997), a pioneer scholar in the study of vernacular language in experimental African-American literature, argues that:

it is crucial that we recall that realism of linguistic representation, like social and magical realism in the novel, is a carefully constructed literary style, not a scientific recording of actual speech (1997, p.9).

*Fishing for Naija* is not concerned with a faithful representation of either London or Nigerian slang, or good and correct English, but with an approximation that carries its contextual points. The Yoruba pronoun disrupts the English text, in similar manner that so-called non-normative gender behaviour seems so threatening to the hetero-normative status quo.<sup>7</sup>

Karl. That one. So immaculate. it was troubling. Abu even had a little fit earlier that evening because **ó** had been doing **ẹ** usual, must look pretty thing. Without words, obviously. Ironed denim wasn't enough. It all had to be prepped properly and colour coded until it was just so. Spending a lot of time in the bathroom, blocking it for the rest of the family. Then a very light grey pair of pants, which had made no sense unless **ó** wanted to match the weather, they were out to get dirty in the snow. When the boy slammed Karl into the fence now it was getting stained ... Karl didn't say a word, no sound left **ẹ** lips. **Ẹ** upper body folded over as much as **ó** could, as much as the guy let **ẹ**.

(Popoola, FfN, Chapter *There's nothing new in exile*).

## The Nigerian Background

Considering the diverse and vast Nigerian literary canon, the topic of queerness is not one easy to find. Trans\* themes are almost completely absent. Novels like the defining and timeless *Things Fall Apart* by Chinua Achebe (1958) were concerned with questioning and defining the idea of nationhood (-building), and the process of decolonisation and independence, rather than indulging in so-called western concerns of sexuality. The twenty-first century brought a change, novels, often written by authors who no longer lived in Nigeria full-time like Chika Unigwe (2010), Chimamanda Adichie (2007), Sarah Ladipo Manyika (2008), who could be called *Afropolitan*, after Taiye Selasie's 2005 seminal essay 'Bye-Bye, Babar (Or: What is an Afropolitan?)',<sup>8</sup> explored new angles with plots that often touched on the Diasporan nature of

<sup>7</sup> For instance discussions around remembering a different pronoun by asserting how "difficult" it is for the person, shifting the focus from the wrongly addressed to oneself.

<sup>8</sup> There is a larger discussion around the usefulness and application of the term Afropolitan. Critiques highlight the materialistic nature while drawing attention to the need for Pan-Africanism (and a more political engagement), amongst other arguments. The term can be useful to highlight a new generation of Diasporic Africans, who go back

their lives and imaginations.<sup>9</sup> Although exclusively hetero-normative narratives prevail by far, Wole Soyinka, one of Nigeria's literary heavyweights and Nobel prize holder in literature, already addressed queer themes<sup>10</sup> in his first novel, *The Interpreters* (1964) in the form of the African American gay visiting history professor Joe Golder. Golder is not cast as a completely sympathetic character but he is fully developed, rather than a caricature. Neville Hoad goes so far to claim that although the novel lends to an allegorical reading of colonisation in regards to Golder and that heterosexuality is "equally neither natural nor self-evident" explored or presented (Hoad, 2007, p.28).

Unoma Azuah discusses a number of women writers who have written about queer themes in their stories and poems in the 90s (2005).<sup>11</sup> These include Titilola Shoneyin 'Woman in her season,' Promise Okekwe's 'Rebecca,' Temilola Abioye's 'Taboo,' Unoma Azuah's 'The Rebel,' as well as latter's poem 'Onishe'. Anzuah echoes the notion of the queer outsider in her readings, especially in Shoneyin's short story 'Woman in her Season,' and concludes overall that the protagonists in those texts are unable to contemplate a Nigerian-Nigerian queer liaison.<sup>12</sup> It seems that although lesbian themes made it into literary works there "is a fear among even the bravest writers" (p.139) and the characters don't explore the possibilities of their sexuality fully, returning to hetero-normativity, and leaving "real" queerness to the outsider, the one that came and will go away again. "It is obvious...that the author's dread of homophobia is responsible for their characters' caution" (ibid.), Azuah continues. It is also possible that it simply denotes the burgeoning of queer themes within the literary canon, especially amongst women writers.<sup>13</sup>

Jude Dibia's novel *Walking the Shadows* offers a comprehensive exploration of sexuality within contemporary Nigeria. His protagonist Adrian (or Ebele) has tried to live a hetero-normative life (married with child) but is outed one day by a vengeful colleague. The novel uncovers how Adrian and his immediate surroundings deal with his queer past. It is a significant work that engages with the topic of queerness in contemporary Nigerian culture, without employing the device of the queer outsider, although Ebele (Adrian) does in the end reverse this trope when he leaves for London to embrace his sexuality fully. By resisting to read queerness as something brought in from outside Dibia tackles the claims of its un-African-ness.<sup>14</sup> It is the first Nigerian novel that dispenses entirely with the notion of "imported queer" by showing what

and forth between their African country and 'other' home, embracing the changing attitudes that come from the movement between and familiarity with different places (and therefore codes, systems, cultures).

<sup>9</sup> Nationhood however remained a prominent trope, as the legacy of colonisation is still prevalent not only in Nigeria, but on the African continent at large. For instance the instant classic *Half of a Yellow Sun* by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie (2007) deals with great insight and empathy with the Biafra war (1967-1970), the Nigerian civil war. Adichie can also be named of as one of the contemporary voices featuring a queer character in her short story...

<sup>10</sup> As it is impossible to chart a history, or field, of trans\* themes in Nigerian or -Diasporic novels, the literary examples have been expanded to wider, queer themes here.

<sup>11</sup> "The Emerging Lesbian Voice in Nigerian Feminist Literatures" in the 90s (in Veit-Wild, F. and Naguschewski, D. *Body Sexuality, and Gender. Versions and Subversions in African Literatures 1*, 2005),

<sup>12</sup> "The responsibility of a Nigerian woman choosing a female lover still seems restricted, as the protagonist is only able to imagine a liaison with a woman in Europe" (Azuah, 2005, p.134).

<sup>13</sup> Shoneyin, for instance, includes a queer crush one of the wives has on the tomato seller in her highly celebrated novel *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives* (2010). It is a sensual moment, where one Nigerian woman admires another, and develops erotic feelings for her that linger much longer than the brief moment of encounter. There is neither fear, nor so-called western influence. This is arguably a much later work but shows the continuity of queer "possibilities" in Shoneyin's work.

<sup>14</sup> Kwame Essien and Saheed Aderinto give a good overview of the scholarship in regards to countering the claim of an inherent and absolute heterosexuality on the continent. Their essay 'Cutting the Head of the roaring Monster' (2009) discusses academics such as Neville Hoad, B.S.Pincheon, Marc Epprecht, Stephen Murray & Will Roscoe, who have all written on the topic.

struggles lie ahead to finding one's sexuality — for anyone — and what particular strategies might be available in Nigeria. This includes presenting a variety of queer relationships.

Trans\* themes from the Nigerian, Diasporic and Afropolitan literary canon are far and few between. As far as novels are concerned, Chris Abani's *The Virgin of Flames* (2007) and Jackie Kay's *Trumpet* (1998) are solitary examples, both written in and from a Diasporan viewpoint.<sup>15</sup> Both feature trans\* protagonists, although Black in Abani's novel is not sure what his idea or choice of gender is, or will become. Kay's character Joss Moody lives his life as a man, marrying a cisgender woman and adopting a son. Only when he dies, does the outside world, including the son, get to know the gender that Joss was assigned to at birth. What is significant is that both novels take place outside Nigeria, on another continent (*Trumpet* in the UK, *The Virgin of Flames* in the US), and both authors live "abroad". The novels reference the African lineage of their characters, Joss's father was an African sailor and Black's father an Igbo immigrant from whom Black inherits a distorted picture of Igbo philosophy, but both texts leave the expression of gender-queerness or trans\*ness in the western hemisphere. Black's family is said to be inflicted with a curse which kills all male children under six. To outsmart the curse, Black is dressed as a girl until he turns seven. As an adult Black struggles with recovering a picture of his past, he remembers fragments at a time and attempts to piece them together to shed light on his desire for cross-dressing, and his homo-erotic feelings. Madhu Krishnan's analysis uncovers the relationship of performance, identity and tradition and states that

...the novel challenges the very idea of static origins and easily-applicable labels in a landscape far removed from stereotypical visions of African Literatures and identities (2012).

Gender is explored here in all its im/possibilities, tied to social and cultural conventions, yet simultaneously destabilised by social and cultural factors.

That's just the problem," Black said. "I don't know if I wear that dress because I am looking for my father, myself, because I want to be a woman or simply because Sweet Girl is a lesbian (Abani, 2007, p.198).

Nigeria's recent adoption of the so-called 'anti-same-sex marriage prohibition act,' signed into law by president Goodluck Jonathan in January 2014,<sup>16</sup> makes an open exploration of trans\* and queer topics, both in artistic and academic frameworks an even more difficult undertaking. On the other hand it has already pushed prominent figures to publicly condemn this new backlash of homophobia and human rights violation, and has sparked both existing and new activist and grassroots organisations to provide counter-narratives. Condemning voices have come from human rights activists and organisation, from writers such as Wole Soyinka (Luso, 2013), Chimamanda Adichie, Bernadine Evaristo and Jackie Kay (Flood, 2014) to musicians such as Femi Kuti (2014) and Seun Kuti (2014) (both sons of the legendary musician Fela Kuti)

<sup>15</sup> Kay is a Scottish-Nigerian writer, born in Scotland, she grew up with adopted parents and documented the search for her Nigerian father, and his failure to recognise her publicly, in her memoir *Red Dust Road* (2011).

<sup>16</sup> The continent at large suffers from a recent backlash. For instant Uganda's anti-homosexuality bill, that was passed by President Museveni in February 2014, was instigated by right-wing US evangelists who have been carrying their hateful messages to Uganda, in search for a welcome home. See for instance Roger Ross William's documentary "God loves Uganda (2013) which uncovers the relationship between the International House of Prayer US missionaries and a new inflammation of homophobia in Uganda. Right-wing evangelist Scott Lively is another key player in this regard.

(2014), as well as Diasporic artist Adejoke Tugbiyele (2014).<sup>17</sup> A contribution to the overall discussion of queer and trans\* issues in Nigeria could therefore not be more timely, and important, to raise alternative voices that contest the essential claim of queerness being un-African.

It is not a Nigerian “thing” to speak too directly. Verbal communication is dominated by the exchanges of well-wishes and greetings, flattery, exaggeration and banter. The Yoruba have a long-standing tradition of proverbs which deliver opinions through their complex interpretations and meanings.<sup>18</sup> This can result in issues not being addressed openly, especially if one is mindful of the strong tradition of seniority, which demands respect towards those who are elders, or socially higher-ranking.

Oyeronke Oyewumi concluded in her book *The Invention of Women: Making an African Sense of Western Gender Discourse* (1997) that there were no inherent gender distinctions based on biological sex in Yoruba society before colonial rule. She is basing her argument on the absence of specifically gendered language of the Oyo-Yoruba of south-western Nigeria, on the fact that “in Yoruba, gender distinctions *only* occur in terms of anatomical sex” (Bakare-Yusuf, 2003, p.124) and that there “are no gender-specific words denoting son, daughter, brother, or sister. Yoruba names are not gender-specific; neither are *oko* and *aya* – two categories translated as the English husband and wife” (Oyewumi quoted in Bakare-Yusuf, 2003, p. 124). Instead, according to Oyewumi, hierarchy was (almost) exclusively based on seniority, which *is* linguistically marked. J. L. Matory however contests her argument by pointing out the many words that do show gender distinctions, like the titles of authority that are explicitly gendered (for instance *baale*, a male sector or town chief or *iyale*, senior wife) (Matory, 2005, p.xxvi). Bakare-Yusuf has a similar stance in her review of Oyewumi’s book, arguing that the absence of gender hierarchies and cultural norms cannot be proven by language alone, as power relations are embedded in the linguistic exchange, not just in the language itself, but in how and when something is expressed, as well as the social relations at large. More likely in an attempt to reject Western feminism, Oyewumi’ in her analysis reads into Yoruba language what is not really there, or not completely absent. Bakare goes further to argue that “without allowing for a distinction between meaning and its socio-existential context, Oyewumi’s analysis reduces language to semiotics and representation” (2003, p.122) and later on in her essay that “the meaning of words even within the same present can alter from place to place and context to context...” (2003, p.128). Bakare-Yusuf’s analysis is the more rigorous approach, laying out the complexity of Yoruba interactions, relations, and world views. It would extend the scope of this essay to summarise all of her points; but I have quoted her here to show the difference that theory and creative practice can take. While Oyewumi is not able to argue away a whole system because there is no “symbolically, grammatically or normative inferior” position for the Yoruba *obinrin* (female) to *okunrin* (male), in a creative work we indeed use language as a means of “semiotics and representation” (ibid., p.122). Here is where conventional and practice-based research meet at the cross-roads but go their separate ways.

<sup>17</sup> There is wide range of scholarship, activism and creative works available, on the continent at large.

<sup>18</sup> “Yoruba daily speech is full of proverbs and allusions, whose persuasive power derives from the tendentious but implicitly self-evident analogies...” Matory 2005, p. xxiii) Or see Bakare-Yusuf (2003) “Yorubas consider it indelicate to ‘speak with the whole mouth’” (p.129).

## Eshu, pronouns, and compound language<sup>19</sup>

Borrowing Eshu's voice as a narrator, who chooses to lend the gender-neutral personal pronoun of *ó* and *ẹ* respectively, pulls Karl back to his fatherland, by embracing him from within the Yoruba culture. His Western background is not used as a means of rejection (trans\* = western = disease), in fact Eshu, adds a more complex reading. By using the Yoruba pronoun for the English text Eshu him/ herself takes up the conversation of gender, and makes a case for the need of dispensing with its rigid terms. Matory argues, with reference to Lakoff and Johnson (1980) that "metaphors, and tropes generally, are not simply literary fabrications that take license with the literal truths of the world. Rather, they are models according to which we daily think about and act upon the world" (2005, p. xxxvf). The use of the pronoun works in reverse order, not with the aim of eventually including the Yoruba pronoun itself in the English language, but by widening the understanding and experience of the need of a neologism that can encapsulate our understanding of gender, its fluidity and undefined-ness. Robert Pelton (1992) calls Eshu "a principle of social change" (p.132) who "brings to the surface hidden conflict" (p.138). S/he is the concept of active intervention, the one that seems to disturb without reason, only to reveal that, which is lying beneath and not talked about. Eshu makes things uncomfortable by dragging them out onto the light.

Experimentation with different genders, or linguistic designation, is more readily found in science or speculative fiction, especially by feminist writers. In *Pronoun Envy* (2001, briefly mentioned earlier in this paper) Anna Livia explores a number of works, including literary fiction, which have raised the notion, "that gender categories are themselves problematic, especially when tied to grammatical gender" (p.58). She separates her examples into the three categories: lesbian love story, the transsexual novel, and the detective.<sup>20</sup> The most experimental of the categories seems to be that of the transsexual novel, and here particularly *The One who is Legion* (1939, 1987) by Natalie Clifford Barney, where both main characters are ungendered. Barney goes one step further and dispenses with distinction between singular and plural. "This is *our* tomb-stone—the double of the urn in which *their* ashes mingled and sealed together" (quoted in Livia, 2001, p.75, highlighting Livia). Of particular value to this project is her discussion of Dorothy Bryant's *Kin of Ata are Waiting for You* (1971), which uses kin as unmarked gender, and June Arnold's *The Cook and the Carpenter* (1995) which uses na, nan, naself as pronouns for its non-gendered language. Arnold does not reveal the gender of the three people in the central love triangle of the story until the end, therefore challenging the behaviour expectations readers have in relation to each person.

Each time a reader encounters the neologism kin, na ... he or she is obliged to grapple with the ideological motivation behind these terms. Why have these pronouns been invented? What is wrong with the traditional pronouns they replace?  
(Livia, 2001, p. 138)

In Karl's case one could argue that only affording him a different pronoun, makes for a highlighting that yet again alienates him in the landscape of his peers. Furthermore it does not question the overall structures but stabilises binary gender signifiers for all other characters.

<sup>19</sup> Compound has been used here to denote the merging of two or more codes, dialects, languages or similar.

<sup>20</sup> They cannot all be named in this brief paper, include *In Transit* by Brigid Brophy (1969) in the transsexual novel, and Maureen Duffy's *Love Child* (1971), Cristina Peri-Rossi's *Solitario de Amor* (1987) and Jeanette Winterson's *Written On the Body* (1992) in her lesbian category.

These are questions that could not be solved at this point, as the pronoun choices are tied to cultural heritage, and Karl is *fishing* for his connection with *Naija* (Nigeria).

The novel does away with long passages of pidgin but makes subtler changes, which are centered around Karl and Nakale's growing friendship. The closer they get, the more they explore each other's words or expressions.

"I'm just so tired Nakale. I needed a minute."

"I dey get am my friend."

"No, it doesn't work like that. I get it or pidgin, not both."

"Why not?"

Nakale made bloody sense, like usual. Karl was lost in ę track.

"Not sure. You're right. I dey get you."

"You fi teach me proper London pidgin o."

"For sure. But we don't call it pidgin."

When had ó become such an annoying smart-ass?

(Popoola, FfN, chapter: *You wanna fly...*)

Language becomes the playful space it is, where both can disappear while they" endlessly come and go" (Trinh T. Minh-ha1989b).

## Conclusion

*Fishing for Naija* broadens the literary conversation, and adds to works such as *Walking with Shadows*, by employing a more overtly conceptual framework and expanding the discussion to trans\* themes. It goes a step further than *The Virgin of Flames* and *Trumpet* by placing the protagonist on Nigerian soil. The novel is disruptive by speaking clearly, making connections between the trickster god Eshu and his/ her understanding (if not connection to) of trans\* identity. It un-silences lived queer and trans\* experience without burdening protagonist Karl with having to beg for acceptance. Acceptance, if not understanding, is implicit in the relationships forged in *Fishing for Naija*, and need no further untangling of the natural (= hetero-normative) subject's journey to affording the non-hetero-normative (= therefore not as natural) their place of existence. The strong bonds between people make understanding organic, and in contrast, the disruption of loyalty (and sharing) becomes the threat.

When Karl finally tells his new found friend Nakale in Port Harcourt, that it does not say Karl and male in his passport, Nakale contests the need for a big palaver about the ins and outs of the coming out.

"How do you know?"

"The woman at the buka."

"But how does she know?"

"Maybe something you say. Ah neva know. When me and you become friends she tell me, make ah better be true friend if ah be any friend at all."

"She said that?"

"Yes."

"And?"

“And wetin?”

“What do you think? I mean...”

“Ahbeg o, now *you* dey make say e be problem?”

Karl’s breath was shallow. How great darkness could be. No viewing of emergency lighting blush.

“De woman she dey ask me one ting. If me ah go be your friend, make ah be real friend, she say.”

He turned around pointing his head towards Karl, lifting from the thin mat that was spread out on the floor. Karl kept staring at the ceiling. There wasn’t anything to see in this darkness but still. One didn’t have to face one’s friend head on. Not all the time, anyway. Nakale waited. Nothing from Karl. Just heavy breathing.

“Karl, me I dey stay for here. You need some more explanation?”

(Popoola, FfN, chapter: *You wanna fly...*)

It is important that Nakale is less bothered than Karl, that he can wait for a conversation, if one needs to be had at all. This act assumes the space of an inherent Nigerian humanity that embraces all persons and genders, one that already offers language, spiritual, and cultural scope.

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### *Bio*

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*Golden Slippers in the Sand*

Mary Lodato

The title of this image is also the title of my autobiography, 'Golden Slippers in the Sand', a phrase which presented itself to me in a dream. In this dream, I was walking along a beach and found a pair of golden slippers that fitted me to perfection. The significance of the slippers was not immediately apparent to me as they were not instantly visible in the dream. It was not until years later that I made the link between the dream and the title of the book. The slippers represented the finding of a direction, a path that I would soon be walking. The colour gold is associated with royalty; it represents the heavens and is often allied with matters sacred or spiritual. Freud, the eminent psychoanalyst, often discussed 'the royal road to the unconsciousness'. On a more personal level, slippers, particularly golden slippers, represent comfort to me.

The snake is an ancient symbol and has found its way into every spiritual tradition and culture in the world. For instance, in Greek mythology snakes are often associated with deadly and dangerous antagonists. It has been said that 'Anywhere a snake shows up as a totem you can expect death and rebirth to occur in some form of your life' (Andrews 2004). The most obvious characteristic of the snake to ancient peoples was its curious ability to shed its skin. From the dried and cracking husk of its former self, the snake emerges moist, colourful, youthful, revived, regenerated. However, for me personally, the snake in this image represents the poisoning of my experience that has woven its way through my life, and my attempt to reconnect with my true essence.

The spiral is a universal symbol, long associated with the mysterious and miraculous process of life, which is embodied in the feminine. This is also suggestive of time, time being understood as a direction of events that bring into being all things. Regardless of one's starting point, the spiral beckons you towards your destination, be it the internal or the external and then regenerates new life again. For me, personally, the spiral represents my attempt at regenerating my life in the context of my past, present and future.

The symbol of the heart has historically been ascribed much mystical significance, either as a metaphor or as the organ of the body believed to have had spiritual or divine attributes. Thus, for example, in Roman Catholicism, the red 'Sacred Heart of Jesus' and 'The Immaculate Heart of Mary' are devotional images. The early philosopher Aristotle considered the heart to be the seat of thought, reason and emotion but rejected the idea that it was directly associated with the brain. The Stoics considered the heart to be the seat of the soul, while the early Roman physician Galen considered the heart to be the seat of the emotions. The reason I depicted the heart in my image is that I consider it to be the place of my emotional centre and thus I am in agreement with Aristotle and Galen. For me, personally, the image of the heart is also a transformational image and the writing of the autobiography was, for me, a transformational journey.

## Autobiographical Writing

### *Introduction*

For me, the most important aspect of writing my PhD thesis has been to understand the process of writing autobiographically. Secondly, it has enabled me to understand and analyse the content of my autobiography to improve my learning and understanding of how society and institutions affected my life, which will in turn inform wider society.

The impetus behind writing my autobiography was to show the lifelong effects on present and future generations. The reason I used the autobiographical method was to express my anger and, frankly, my outrage at the political, social and religious institutions in Ireland. My aim in this thesis was then to use my experience of writing the autobiography to critique existing theories and suggest an alternative approach to analysing autobiographical writing. The thesis allowed me to test theory in practice on the ground. I used the autobiography I have written as a means of looking at my experiences, not in a dispassionate, objective way because, for me, this is what happened; it is my reality. I fully acknowledge that I can never be dispassionate about it, and nor should I be. If I engaged with it on a purely theoretical and methodological level, I would lose the essence of my primary aim in writing the autobiography.

This paper will discuss and dissect various approaches to autobiographical writing and the processes involved with it. When I wrote my autobiography, I was not consciously aware of the cognitive processes in which I was engaging. Reading other women's autobiographical writings had a huge impact on my work and my own self-awareness. Looking at the stories of women's lives helped me to question my own driving force. I wanted to understand the complex nature of writing autobiographically, both from a working-class Irish perspective and a contemporary feminist perspective. I discovered that there was not a great deal of literature surrounding working-class Irish women's autobiographies. This led me to question why there was such limited literature about this particular subject. I have therefore, engaged with literatures and theories of autobiographical writing in a specifically feminine Irish context in order to gain an understanding of the effect of the Catholic Church and state on the Irish national identity.

I will also explore how my project has evolved via various types of autobiographical writing, such as confessional storytelling, the Cinderella genre and scriptotherapy. These genres were used unconsciously as a mode of self-healing. Through my writing, I created a safe and supportive environment for myself to open up and to begin to explore the problems I had experienced more deeply than it was possible to do through talking therapies.

Finally, this paper will consider the ethical issues that have emerged in writing my autobiography. At the stage of autobiographical writing, I was unaware of the ethical issues surrounding writing about deeply personal details relating to other people's lives. Once I began writing this thesis, however, I was forced to engage with the ethical issues which would arise through publication of my work and how this may impact on the lives of others.

### *Approaches to Autobiography*

This section will examine some of the main dimensions or themes in the study of autobiography. I have drawn on key concepts surrounding the construction of a social, cultural, political and religious identity through autobiographical writing. The literature review brings together work exploring how our lives become stories (Eakin, 1999, p. 139) in order to substantiate my understanding of the processes involved and how I have constructed my life writing. Models of identity are central to the way we think about and live our lives, which impacts on how we write about them. Smith (Smith and Watson, 2001, p. 6) suggests that 'None of us lives without reference to an imaginative singularity which we call our "self"'. Autobiographical writing promotes an illusion of self-determination (Eakin, 1999, p. 43). In writing my story, I am saying who I am, I create myself and through this process I create a myth of autonomy. All stories told are relational and the story of self is viewed through the relationship with key others. The emphasis is on the performance of the action taking place or the scene between individuals. In my story I was aware that I was telling my own account of what happened which was often in relation to others like my sister Fin, whom the reader never got to hear from.

Dialogue allows the reader to engage more with the characters, but in my story, I was the narrator. I would have liked my sisters to be heard but my intention was to tell the facts as I understood them and not to fabricate others' thoughts and feelings. It is very difficult to remain detached and objective when writing autobiographically, the relational only comes into play when the analysis begins. During the writing process, one is having a dialogue with oneself and during analysis one enters into the wider dialogue. A common form of relational other person is siblings, lovers or parents, proximate others, intimate ties to the relational autobiographer (Eakin, 1999, p. 86). The 'you' and 'I' and 'she' and 'he' and 'we' trace the unfolding of relational identity in discourse with others and within ourselves. Self is ever-changing.

Writing an autobiography is a dual process, a lifelong formation of identity of self and experience. Through writing the autobiography, unification starts to appear, the use of the 'I' which allows a command of our knowledge of selves and the story that bridges the chasm between who we are and who we were (Eakin, 1999, p. xi).

Smith and Watson (Smith and Watson, 2001, p. 15) suggest that in order to explore the complexity of life narratives we need to understand the constitutive processes of autobiography, which consists of five elements: memory, experience, identity, embodiment and agency. Memory is meaning-making. The act of remembering, when writing autobiographically, may cause the writer to struggle or resist collective remembering. Memories can be triggered by environmental cues as in entering a space associated with an event from the past. The senses are also influential in triggering memories and have the ability to transport a person back to the time and place that something occurred. The impetus to record memories may stem from the desire to make others aware of a time forgotten in both historical and cultural context without diluting the actual facts of events and to bring to light what has been obscured (Smith and Watson, 2001, p. 20-21). Through the act of remembering we re-experience the events of the past in both visceral and emotional contexts and this allows the writer to talk about personal experiences. This can be seen in my autobiography where I am waiting to go to the Redress Board for a full hearing and am sitting in my hotel room. Aldridge describes a similar feeling of uncertainty when being cast back into her story: 'I felt myself sliding into that unfamiliar space that I feared for so long. The one thing that I was fearful of was now happening to me, I was going back into my story' (Aldridge, 2001, p. 2).

Recollection and commentary on traumatic events is scripted and exorcised through the narrator's voice. The narrator needs to be attentive to the effects the story has on their audience due to the act of collective remembering whilst also being aware of the personal function. The autobiographical act can facilitate healing; writing about personal trauma allows the writer to acknowledge how the writing changes both the writer and the life story.

When a narrator starts to write autobiographically it starts off personal; however, it is anything but merely personal. Mediated through memory and language, it is an interpretation of the past and our place within a cultural and historical context.

In my autobiography, there are different Marys voicing the narrative. Each period of time relates to different phases of Mary's life and is addressed by the young Mary and also the older Mary, as appropriate to the time discussed. A succession or multiple layers of identity are constructed from and constitute those experiences. Sometimes these identities are in conflict and contradictory. There may be a resistance to certain identities in the narrator, with the younger Mary wanting to be heard and the older Mary being more reserved. This leads to an internal struggle between the selves and the identities. This can lead to a place where the narrator is, on one hand, trying to conform to what they believe to be expected models of identity in their in-group, and, on the other hand, resisting this conformity. This struggle between the different selves is perhaps where the seed of intent started on the journey to tell Mary's story.

The child Mary can be seen to be kicking and screaming against the powers that be: the Church, the orphanage and the state – 'her captors' – as she rebels against the injustice of the treatment of herself and others. The adult Mary is no longer kicking and screaming; she is taking action. Experience is constitutive of the subject and is about the world and ourselves

and our place in it and about how we know what we know about ourselves. How do we know who we are? Ó Buachalla defines experience as a process by which subjectivity is constructed.

One places oneself or is placed in a social reality and so perceives and comprehends as subjective, those relations, material, economical and interpersonal, which are in fact social and in a larger perspective, historical. (Ó Buachalla, 1988, p. 22)

Through discursive writing we are able to understand ourselves and our need for healing through the language itself. This is where autobiographical writing can be used to challenge institutional circulated knowledge, what has happened and is happening (Smith and Watson, 2001, p. 25). In Mary's story, this can be seen when she attends the Redress in order to bear witness to the truth of what had happened to her in the orphanage (Aldrige, 2001, p. 1). Foucault describes this as a discursive regime. He suggests we experience ourselves through multiple domains of discourse that serve as cultural registers for what counts as experiences and who counts as an experiencing subject (Foucault, 1961). In writing autobiographically, the narrator becomes the reader of their experience, thus validating the experience as truth and justifying what is written. During the act of writing, the narrator claims an authoritative voice for their own experience, which may be explicit and therefore confers political, cultural and social credibility. This can be seen in my autobiography where I situate myself in the group of the 'Survivors of Institutional Abuse' and invite the reader to accept my voice as authoritative.

Identity in writing autobiographically involves the narrator identifying themselves to the reader. In my narrative, I am identifying myself in relation to the religious and political experience of being a survivor of institutional abuse in Ireland. This involves looking at the ideologies and symbolic structures that organise human experience. Identity of difference implies identity of likeness; the survivor movement has a shared ground in that we have a shared historical identity, which in turn gives us a shared commonality. That shared commonality is constantly changing; the group identity is always in flux. Identities are constructed through language and are not essentially born, they are not inherited or natural but social organisation can 'lead us to regard identity as given or fixed' (Smith and Watson, 2001, p. 33). Does this mean that we adopt identity through the discourses that surround us? Bakhtin (Morson, 1983) argues that social groups have their own language; each member of the group becomes a member through their shared language and the group identity. Hall (Hall, 1997) argues that identity is a production which is never complete, always in process, always constituted within, not outside, representation. He suggests that the point of instability comes within discourses of history and culture.

We also need to be aware of the universal differences in identity when defining man/woman in historical and cultural contexts. Intersectional identities arise when our cultural signpost points in two or more different directions, e.g. growing up in Irish society after having been born in Britain and struggling to identify with either. Autobiographical writing allows one to embrace a mixture of identities: the multiple and intersectional identities which come into being through this process. The 'I' moves backwards and forwards between the outer and inner self. Navigating these conflicting zones can be



problematic. A nomadic identity can form through time and across political space (Anzaldua, 1987). My own identity and sense of self was forged through the experiences of oppression, displacement and a distinct lack of belonging. I was forced to incorporate the multiple and intersectional identities caused by a cultural divide that was not only personal to me but evident on a national level. I felt caught between the Irish and British identity. I wanted to belong, to identify myself as part of a group within society. My Irish accent naturally defined me as Irish to others, and this was not a label I desired as it was a time of great cultural and political conflict between the two countries.

Thus time and place are very important when considering cultural identity. There is a time and place for what can be included and excluded in autobiographical narrative, influenced by what is culturally available and what a society is prepared to acknowledge about a narrative experience.

### *Embodiment*

The body is a site of autobiographical knowledge because memory is itself embodied (Smith and Watson, 2001). Life narratives are a site of embodied knowledge because autobiographical narrators are embodied. It is the body that reacts to the external world through our senses and in how we perceive the world, as in the flight or fight response, for example. We internalise images and experiences and our body reacts to this data by responding in a visceral way. Embodied subjects are located through and in their bodies in culturally specific ways. Life narrators are multiply embodied: the neuro- chemical, anatomical and imaginary reflect social and familial beliefs about the body and the socio-political body; ‘...a set of cultural attitudes and discourses encoding the public meanings of bodies that underwrite relationships of power’ (Smith and Watson, 2001, p. 38). Through autobiographical writing, the narrator is challenging, contesting and revising cultural norms of embodiment (Grosz, 1994).

### *Agency*

Experience, identity and embodiment are all linked to agency. The narrator tells their story through the cultural script. By demystifying the subject and the concept of free will, agency means being aware of the act of manipulation of the space, politically, emotionally and physically. By understanding the constitutive elements of systems one can create a new sense of agency. The unconscious is the place of our inaccessible desires and experiences that have been repressed in order to conform to social norms. Agency is the bridge between the psychic and the social so-called norms. Autobiographical writing allowed me to create a new sense of agency in my internal world, writing my internal dialogue into existence in the external. Through the writing process we may be able to get in touch with the parts of the psyche that have become dis-identified and bring them into consciousness. Wingrove posits

that ‘agents change, and change their world, by virtue of the systematic operation of multiple ideologies’ (Wingrove, 1999, p. 871). In the act of narrating their lives, people might come to understand the story they tell, might gain access to other cultural scripts, might come to understand themselves differently, might exercise agency (Smith and Watson, 2001, p. 45). This can be seen in the epilogue of my autobiography where the adult Mary reunites with her mother and feels the invisible emotional barrier between them shatter into millions of pieces after thirty-nine years (Aldrige, 2001, p. 278).

Autobiographical acts are anything but simple. Life narratives are symbolic interactions in the world and are culturally and historically specific. The concepts of memory, experience, identity embodiment and agency allow us to probe the complexity of the autobiography and to situate the story in time and place.

While the first section has explored the dimensions of writing autobiographically from the perspective of the author, this next section outlines some of the theoretical perspectives that have been used to analyse autobiographical writing. First, I will consider different debates and positions within the literature on autobiography as methodology. Writing autobiographically is different from an academic analysis of it, but that does not necessarily preclude the possibility that you can theorise about it. In fact, it might be the case that it is easier to theorise than to write. Narrative practice and life histories are academic accounts which centre on research-based reflexivity of other people’s stories, whereas autobiography recounts the writer’s personal experiences which are written for a wider audience. I will now discuss this in more detail in the following section.

Some academic theories are helpful in appreciating and considering the difference between life stories, life narratives and autobiographical writing. Plummer explains the diversity of life stories by pointing to various methods of investigation that can be utilised as a resource (Plummer, 1990). Life stories can be told in a variety of forms, such as through the medium of the visual in addition to that of the written word (Harrison, 2009). It is sometimes the case, however, that academic inquiry does not take into account how autobiographical writing connects one to the emotion and passion that is experienced in the process of writing. In the context of my autobiography, I am talking about the ‘I’ as an emotional engagement with the subject content of the narrative, which, in turn, asks the reader to engage with the reality of the autobiography. It challenges the reader to engage on a deeper level.

I appreciate the limits that most academics confront due to restricted academic frameworks. Feminist academics seem to have predominantly based their theorisation, critiques and analysis on practices that differ from autobiographical writing, i.e. on personal-narrative and life-story methods of writing. These critics take sections of a life story or a personal narrative and analyse it from a position of relative luxury. Their methodology is based on certain scholarly forms. Accordingly, they are only observers of other people’s struggles in the narrative that emerges. This is especially clear in the work of Smith and Watson (Smith and Watson, 2001). Although they provide an adequate analytical technique with which to interpret autobiographical writing, life histories and personal narrative, their own

experience has not been included in the process of writing autobiography personally. As such, they are not and cannot write from their own personal experience, having fully encountered the journey inwards towards expression of the storied self. Sangster (Sangster, 1994) suggests that the guiding principle of life histories could be that all autobiographical memory is true and that it is up to the reader to explore the narrative and the inner world of the writer as well as the physical existence, and make their own unique discoveries from their journey into the narrative. The reader must enter into their inner world and feel the emotional and psychological aspects of their internal world in order to discover what resonates with them.

### *Women's Autobiographies*

Feminist approaches have brought about a deeper understanding of women's lives in contemporary society, and helped shape the research agenda by articulating what is important to them. Why and how women make sense of their past affords an insight into the political, social and material world they inhabit. Autobiographical writing requires one to question the social, political and material existence that you have inhabited and that you inhabit. Through writing autobiographically, one is trying to rewrite the female self into history. This is essential because 'a sense of that which is lost, never to be recovered completely, has been one of the most powerful rhetorical devices of modern women's history' (Steedman, 1986, p. 104).

Tamboukou suggests that self-writing allows the female self to emerge in history and allows us to see what has been sidelined or kept silent by focusing on the insignificant details (Tamboukou, 2003, p. 30). Women's self-writing comes from an opaque history and gives voice to experiences ignored for a very long time. What counts as experience is neither self-evident nor straightforward; it is always contested and therefore always political. Writing autobiographically can be a political act because it asserts a right to speak rather than to be spoken for (Estes, 1992). In the telling of my life story I am challenging the then dominant patriarchal ethos and pointing the gaze to the overlooked stories of women in Ireland. Writing is constructed out of conflicts and eruptions that come to the fore when gender interrupts the tradition of writing the self (Estes, 1992). Tamboukou argues that:

Writing, truth and power are forcefully interwoven in the matrix of self technologies: searching the 'truth' for the self through writing, recording these truths as a reservoir for an ongoing process of acting upon the self and of acting upon others. (Tamboukou, 2003, p. 31)

She suggests that, as a technology, writing the self has been a crucial theme in feminist explorations of the subject.

Smith and Watson's (Smith and Watson, 2001) 'Toolkit for Reading Autobiographies' offers useful signposts for the analysis of the construction of identity. I have found their methodological approach a useful way to analyse the themes within my story. However, I find their autobiographical perspective limiting in providing a full understanding of Irish cultural identity and traumatic experiences that people have suffered.

In contrast to Smith and Watson's studies, works such as that of Maya Angelou (1977), Andrea Ashworth (Ashworth, 1998), Carolyn Steedman (2000) and bell hooks (bell, 1989) address cultural identity as wells from which we draw deposits acknowledging the importance of 'self' and the 'I' in the subjective element of any writing. In Maya Angelou's autobiographical volumes, she was able to publicly discuss her deeply personal life. I respect her for having the courage as a black woman to speak out, to challenge the common structure of the autobiography by critiquing, changing and expanding the genre. Her books centred on themes such as identity, family abuse and racism and her memoirs are an example to other marginalised women.

Ashworth's portrayal of the abuse she suffered at the hands of her stepfather, and her escape through the solace of reading, had a profound impact on me. *Once in a House on Fire* is an autobiographical work which beautifully depicts her struggles to triumph in the face of adversity. The crucial relevance of this text is its highlighting of how a very specific set of circumstances – in this case, the death of the author's biological father – can lead to vulnerability and abuse. This parallels my own autobiographical work and thesis. In Ashworth's case, the father was replaced by an abusive figure; in my own, my father was replaced by an abusive patriarchal institution. A second parallel with my project lies in Ashworth's use of education as a solace, a path to healing.

bell hook's graphic description of wanting to kill herself 'With the longing to kill the self I was without really having to die. I wanted to kill that self in writing' (Harrison, 2009, p. 125) resonated with the way I felt. I was holding on, like hooks, to these painful feelings and was attached to them in a way that did not allow pleasure to come into my daily existence. It was through the writing that I realised that I could possibly find the key to my own healing. Steedman situates herself as a working-class woman and encourages other working-class women to tell the stories of their lives, whilst acknowledging that 'not all working class childhoods are the same, nor that experience of them produces unique psychic structures' (Steedman, 1986, p. 16). Steedman takes a step further by analysing the social, historical and political impact on the personal.

I have a respect for these writers as I feel a resonance with their stories due to their personal content. These autobiographical accounts, where the writer retells her own experience, are similar to my own story. In this light, Steedman criticises Ann Oakley's 1984 *Taking it Like a Woman*, which uses the outlines of conventional romantic fiction to tell of middle-class girlhood. She argues that women like Oakley, who came from an articulate

professional liberal middle-class background, claim to have similar familial experiences to many working-class children. Yet, as she puts it,

What they cannot bear [...] is that there exists a poverty and marginality of experience to which they have no access, structures of feeling that they have not lived within (and would not want to live within for these are the structures of deprivation). (Steedman, 2000, p. 17)

For me, this is a critique of much contemporary research. I feel that it is important to get first-hand examples of people's lives and that when this is evident it has a far greater impact. Inglis asks:

Is it possible for intellectuals who are not (in Gramsci's terms) completely organic – and who do not have direct personal experience which links them to those about whom they write – to be able to write anything which is valid, meaningful and potentially emancipatory? (Inglis, 1998b, p. 28)

Inglis argues that if the writing of academics does not correctly mirror the lived experience of those about whom they write, their accounts may not simply be invalid, but 'may increase rather than help them overcome their domination and oppression' (Inglis, 1998b, p. 28). This is in direct juxtaposition to the autobiographical approach. In my opinion, if we are to learn from other people's analyses, we need to know they have personally experienced the lived process of writing an autobiography. Not everyone can do this, however. Autobiographers such as Steedman and hooks use personal knowledge and life experience to give credibility to their writing. Steedman suggests that her autobiography 'is about interpretations, about the places where we rework what has already happened to give current events meaning' (Steedman, 2000, p. 5). This is indicative of the notions I have spoken about above, and is at the core of my argument and thesis: one can only make sense of current events in the context of past personal experience.

Previous academic researchers have attempted to investigate autobiographical writing by evaluating isolated events in a person's life and how these have been narrated. This micro-management of details ignores the embedded nature that characterises the whole story so that, as a consequence, the overall picture is lost. How individual elements in a person's account interact both at micro and macro level is not fully explored in a number of so-called *linear analytic* techniques (Smith and Watson, 2001). This is where I have a problem with many theorists; in their analyses, lives become fragmented and decontextualised. In autobiographies by survivors of institutional abuse in the Republic of Ireland, for example, there are accounts of personal experience of life in the institution in isolation, without embedding these within a political, social and cultural context (see Fahy, 1999 for an exception).

In my attempt to understand the process involved in personal writing, I found the traditional approaches somewhat limited in their capacity to be fully comprehensive (see Smith and Watson, 2001 for an example to this approach). I have become aware of the limitations of traditional generic Anglo-American and European approaches to autobiography. Irish autobiography is plural by nature and has a compound genre identity (Lynch, 2009). Consequently, I have explored literatures and theories of autobiographical writing in a specifically Irish context to gain a deeper understanding of the unique effect of the Church and state on the Irish nation (Lynch, 2009, Inglis, 1998b). In particular, when considering how the discourse of sexuality was different in Ireland, Foucault's theories about sex have some relevance, especially his notion of discourse that centres on the policing of bodies in marriage, family and property relations. Here, bodies and sexuality are policed at both the collective and public level and at the private level by the state and the individual. Foucault suggests that sex can be used in an indirect fashion as a discerning means to control and regulate (Foucault, 1961). In regard to Ireland, this has a limited application. Until the end of the twentieth century, there existed in Ireland a powerful relationship between religion and sex, which can be seen in Foucauldian terms as the 'thematic of sin' (Ferriter, 2009). Ferriter suggests that 'what is missing in a Foucauldian analysis is an understanding of the Irish sensibility about sex; the particular way the game of sexuality was played in Ireland' (Ferriter, 2009, p. 3).

There is a dearth of literature of the experience of being working class in 1960s Ireland. O'Neill suggests that

... what little documentation there is on working class culture has been written 'from the outside in', by middle class writers and researchers. Inevitably, many working class customs tend to escape middle class attention and working class people have themselves failed to document the networks, language and customs central to their lives. (O'Neill, 1992, p. 27)

Let me set the scene of what it means to me to have grown up in an Irish working-class environment fractured by poverty and unemployment. Ireland was controlled by the Church, which 'demanded blind obedience from all ranks of society, especially the working class' (Fahy, 1999, p. 146). Writing my autobiography allowed me to look at my Irish working-class roots, dissect them and separate the different aspects of what it means to be a working-class person today. I can now appreciate the class structures that exist within British society. This process has challenged me to integrate the good and positive aspects of having a working-class self.

The class structure in Ireland and England when I grew up had clearly defined boundaries in relation to housing, education and employment. The quality of housing for the working class in Ireland was really poor. In Ireland, there was no welfare system until the early 1970s with the introduction of the Deserted Wives Allowance (Friedman, 1996, p. 56). Prior to this, there were no state provisions for the less privileged in society and houses were overcrowded, squalid and dreary. There were huge handicaps to the working classes, particularly women, who have limited access to the kinds of cultural capital that formal education could provide. Education was free at the point of entry and the law stated that every child had to attend school. However, books were not free and poor families could not buy them, so 'poor children were penalised because of their poverty' (O'Neill, 1992, p. 97). Due to their lack of knowledge and engagement with their cultural capital, the working class were disempowered and marginalised. Married working-class women were at a greater disadvantage than the rest of the population because they were denied the right to work and receive further education. They did not have access to the means to further their skills in any field such as the arts. It was men, such as Brendan O'Carroll and Roddy Doyle (O'Carroll, 1994, O'Carroll, 1995, Rogers, 2004, Ikeda, 2003a, Strong, 2013), who were given the privilege of telling the stories of Irish working-class women.

This problem reflects a deep repression of women's creative expression generally in the arts within Irish culture. The majority of autobiographies have been written by male scholars, whilst women generally have not expressed their own life narrative, in particular working-class women.

The struggle for self-development and women's education in Ireland can be seen as part of a larger feminist struggle to reconstitute not only what we know, but the way we seek to know and understand the world, particularly the social world, in which we live. Part of this process involves validating the importance of personal stories and the knowledge they provide of social life. It is in the story of everyday life that we can better understand how domination, marginalisation and oppression have been written into the bodies and minds of Irish women (Inglis, 1998b, p. 14).

Irish society has progressed from 1967, when secondary-level education first became free to all, to the Celtic Tiger period (1995–2007), when state funding was made available to enable people with poor literacy to tell their own stories, and there is a wider interest in working-class women's lives. Irish working-class women are getting an education and therefore telling their own stories. The author and playwright Roddy Doyle, for example, has set up writing workshops for adults so that they can tell their stories. In the past, in order for their stories to be heard, Irish women often relied on the fictional, autobiographical, oral traditions of storytelling, as this was seen as safe. A story such as mine is part of a wider narrative of working-class women attempting to challenge and alter the tradition of a male-dominated genre that has existed in Ireland:

Power to define what constitutes justice has always resided with a small group of privileged elites, who are male, white, physically strong, rich or at least middle-class, and belong to the nation's ethnic and religious majority. (McKay, 2000)

Ireland has always had a very strong oral storytelling tradition that has been passed from one generation to the next, generally through the female line. Peig Sayers, a traditional Irish folklore and storyteller who was most famous for her autobiography *Maibnamh Seanmhnaí/An Old Woman's Reflections*, is still considered relevant today in the language that she has used in her autobiography. The existence of the tradition is confirmed by Louise Raw in her book *The Matchwomen*, which records that the grandchildren of some of the strikers report that their grandmothers sang Irish rebel songs from the eighteenth and nineteenth century and knew by name leaders such as Robert Emmett, who was executed in Dublin in 1803.

There is a new genre of biographical writing in Ireland which, in contrast to traditional biographies, is frank, honest and confessional in its approach. The absence of such writing up to now may be linked to a morality derived from Catholic Church teaching which confined stories about the self to the confessional and which tended to devalue and criticise people talking about themselves. (Inglis, 1998b, p. 28)

Considering the extent of patriarchal dominance in the society within which we lived, it is hardly surprising that there was a disregard and indifference towards Irish women and their oppression throughout the majority of the twentieth century. In comparison to the number of autobiographies written and published by men, the number of stories about Irish women have been few and far between, and those that were written by women were censored by the state and the Catholic Church. Thus, as Inglis remarks:

It is no coincidence that there have been relatively few biographies or autobiographies written about women in Irish society. Patriarchal Catholic power has excluded personal stories, especially if they are about ordinary women. The task of rewriting Irish history, society and culture has not only got to take into account the personal, but if the stories are to be emancipatory they have also to taken into account the conditions and structures of power through which people's lives are constituted. (Inglis, 1998b, p. 23)

In recent years, there has been an increase in autobiographical writing by women in Ireland. However, it was the English writer Andrea Ashworth's autobiography *Once in a House on Fire* (Ashworth, 1998), previously discussed, that started me on the road to writing my own. My autobiography resonates more with other recent autobiographies by women from Ireland, which are also about a journey to healing, and which encompass the broader political structures that were in play. In June Goulding's *The Light in the Window* (Goulding, 1998), set in 1950s Ireland, the author discusses her experience of working in a



‘mother and baby home’. Her description of the nature of her work and the women she met has a direct bearing on my own story.

Part of my autobiography is also set in Italy, which did not have the same cultural definitions of class; rather, family ties determined where people lived. There was no welfare system in Italy because of the cultural and political structures where the family is expected to provide for ‘its own’. I spent some time in a mother and baby institution in London when pregnant with my first child. Unlike Italy, both England and Ireland had established welfare systems. However, in England I felt supported, as their system gave the power to the individual by providing them directly with monetary support rather than giving these funds to the Catholic Church, as was the case in Ireland, thus rendering the individual powerless and in a state of complete dependence. The parallels are similar, and yet different in terms of the checks and balances in the English institutions, which limited their power. In London, I was put under tremendous pressure to give my child up for adoption. If I had been in Ireland, I would have had no choice, as Goulding vividly describes in her book: ‘Only a small minority of girls whose family could pay £100 (a fortune in 1951) to the nuns, were free to leave ten days after the birth of their baby. Their babies were immediately available for adoption’ (Goulding, 1998, p. 16).

There is a strong link between Goulding’s autobiography and two other recent autobiographies, Bernadette Fahy’s *Freedom of Angels: Surviving Goldenbridge Orphanage* (1999) and Kathy O’Beirne’s *Don’t Ever Tell* (2005), which recounts her incarceration in a series of Catholic homes and a psychiatric unit, before she ended up in the Magdalene Laundry. While Goulding looks at the institution that provides the human cargo (the babies) for the orphanages, Fahy and O’Beirne look at their own experiences of institutional abuse in Irish orphanages in the 1950s and 1960s. These three accounts bring to light how the industrial schools, the mother and baby homes and Magdalene Laundries provided a doubly lucrative situation for the Catholic Church by generating income as well as increasing its power. Firstly, the industrial schools were able to claim money from the Irish state for the children in the orphanages and the babies that came from the mother and baby homes. Secondly, if a baby was adopted, the Catholic Church was still able to claim money from the parents of the girl who went into the mother and baby home. If the parents could not afford the £100 then the Catholic Church profited further by keeping the mother in the Magdalene Laundry and using her as cheap labour for the rest of her life. Thirdly, these babies from the orphanage were only given out to so-called good, practising Catholic families, thereby swelling the ranks of the Catholic Church.

Fahy points to the fact that, at this time in Ireland, ‘religious institutions ... were the organs of the state’ (Fahy, 1999, p. 135). This has helped to inform my thesis because it considers the relationship between Church and state in Ireland during the same period and the repressive and abusive institutions that grew out of that relationship – the workhouses of the nineteenth century were staffed by nuns, as were the non-fee-paying schools and other key institutions created to deal with the poor and vulnerable. The poor

have historically posed a threat to state power and ‘industrial schools [like my own, St. Joseph’s, High Park] were designed to remove that threat’ (Fahy, 1999, p. 139).

There are clear parallels between the experiences of Fahy and O’Beirne and my own, and in the nature of our autobiographies. Their works inform my thesis as comparative narratives. The key questions we are attempting to reconcile are: ‘...why did regime have to be so harsh, so cruel. What on earth led these adults of the fifties and sixties in Ireland to deal with innocent, needful children in such an uncaring and destructive way?’ (Fahy, 1999, p. 135). ‘How was it possible for such widespread abuse to remain hidden for so long? Was it a matter of see no evil, hear no evil – that peculiarly Irish attitude which permits the unspeakable to live comfortably alongside the ordinary?’ (O’Beirne, 2005, p. 13). I see my autobiography as joining with fellow survivors in breaking this conspiracy of silence.

### *Types of Autobiography*

The data for my autobiography was drawn from many different sources, including diary entries, personal drawings and television documentaries, as well as personal memories. In varying ways it also draws on a number of different autobiographical conventions such as the culture of the ‘confessional’, the ‘Cinderella’ genre and scriptotherapy.

### *Confessional Culture and Confession in Storytelling*

We find ourselves, either knowingly or unknowingly, living within a confessional culture of storytelling. People’s lives have become a form of cheap entertainment for the media-savvy industry (Eakin, 1999). The more lurid and shocking the story, the more attention it is paid. Bookshelves are now filled with volumes of biographies of ‘celebrities’ who have found their 15 minutes of fame. The biographers profiteer from the suffering and exploitation of these unwitting individuals. This moral transgression can be seen to be frequently ignored by biographers who write about celebrities’ lives. This is fuelled by the public’s desire to consume the lives of others in a voyeuristic fashion, which leads to celebrities’ lives being a commodity. The media utilises the tragedy of the lives of others for sensationalism. (Eakin, 1999, p.161) suggests, ‘the hunger of the public for private lives of the rich and famous has spawned a breed of professional privacy-buster gossip columnists and paparazzi’.

Some celebrities, however, open the door and welcome this voyeuristic intrusion in their private lives. Katie Price is an example of a celebrity who can be seen to have a narcissistic approach and thrive on the attention she gets from the media. Some individuals make an informed choice about what they enter into and then what they reveal to the public at large. In the case of Katie Price, it would seem that she has made an enterprise out of her most intimate relationships. Living in a confessional culture, celebrities reveal intimate daily life details, hyped by the media as very important, when it comes to making life-style

choices. This has led to a lack of respect for others in the field of journalism and poses the question: what have been the effects of the life writer on the individual in relation to their objectification?

Conversely, some contemporary autobiographical writers allow their private lives to become public knowledge in order to situate personal accounts in the self-help genre. The autobiographer's self-disclosure may have a dual effect: to benefit the person who writes the narrative and to teach wider society something, i.e. didactic and cathartic. An example of this can be seen in Stephen Fry's *Moab is My Washpot* (1997), which details his experiences of mental illness, and in the confessional autobiography of Paddy Doyle's *The God Squad* (1988), which focuses on living with cerebral palsy; this has a far greater influence on society as a whole, with its altruistic element that aims to encourage society to embrace hope over adversity. By speaking out about stigmatised, 'taboo' topics, what is unspeakable in society, the self-help genre helps to normalise and neutralise subjects that are hard to discuss in order to give others greater understanding.

The above examples of people's private lives can all be seen to have a confessional element. This is relevant to my story; however, there is another aspect to the confessional in the context of growing up in Ireland. The confessional box was a cultural norm in Ireland during the twentieth century. Most people went to confession once a week, to get absolution for their so-called sins. This gave tremendous controlling power to the Catholic Church over day-to-day life in Ireland. The confessional box seems to me to have a very strong link between the cathartic experience of writing an autobiography and going to confession where one reveals one's impure thoughts, feeling and actions. In writing autobiography, one begins to explore the effects of actions oneself. In the confessional box, the power is in the hands of the priest, who provides the individual with absolution, thereby instilling a feeling of guilt to gain control. Encouraged to confess, people will confess trivial things, for example, if they did not come home on time. However, if one were to confess any deep philosophical thoughts or moral dilemmas, penance would be increased. This culture of the confessional seemed to be a way of controlling ordinary people. Liz Stanley suggests that the acts and apparatus of confession within Roman Catholicism provide an example which can be 'turned' in both directions: confession can be seen as the expression of an inner sense of selfhood within modernity, but it can also be understood as a product of an external system of surveillance in which regulation and requirement are associated with organisation, power and audit. (Stanley, 1993, p. 45)

The confessional box is well used by the Catholic Church to inform it of the deepest worries and concerns of the congregation so that it can manipulate people's worst fears to further its own agenda.

The therapist, to my mind, can be seen as the modern equivalent of the priest in the confessional box; again, in front of the therapist, the person feels a sense of powerlessness, as one would feel in the confessional box (see also Lawler, 2008). I discuss therapeutic aspects later in the paper; the point here is to draw a parallel in the power relationships between confession and therapy. From personal experience, I have found the therapist can

use what is said in the session to undermine your sense of development, depending on the mood they are in. As Greer points out ‘psychiatry is an extraordinary confidence trick: the unsuspecting creature seeks aid because she feels unhappy, anxious and confused, and psychology persuades her to seek the cause in herself’ (Greer, 1970, p. 103). This analysis of how blame for social ills is passed to the victims of these ills by making them feel personally responsible ties in with my own project. The priest does the same thing, but he gives you an extra penance of saying the rosary – fifty ‘Hail Mary’s and five ‘Our Fathers’, which in reality is about an hour’s prayer – and on your knees. It is not the same as sitting in a studio in a comfortable chair with the light shining on you, is it? In Fahy’s 1999 account, rosary beads were made by children in the orphanages, from the age of six, a job which paid them 2/6d on St Patrick’s Day for a whole year’s work, which would be withheld if they were not ‘good’. In some cases, it left them with scars on their hands until they were adults (Fahy, 1999, p. 45).

Nevertheless, my autobiography is in many ways testimonial; it is a confession to myself, and I grant myself absolution. Yet it also goes beyond contemporary notions of confessional culture because it bears witness to historical events of the past:

... effective voicing of certain kinds of trauma must go beyond the confessional to acts of witnessing. The confessional mode, they suggest, focuses attention on a victim’s psychological state rather than the perpetrator’s act and invests power in a confessor as interpreter and judge, stripping the survivor of authority and agency. (Smith and Watson, 2001, p. 205)

At the Redress Board, my barrister asked me how much I thought my compensation should be. I replied that I had not come for compensation alone but to bear witness to the events in my childhood. The focus in the Redress was on the impact of my mother’s psychological state and mine, which absolved the Irish Church and state from responsibility.

### *The Cinderella Genre*

My autobiography falls into both the Cinderella and self-help genres I have described above.

Fairytales depend upon people and things that appear to be one thing only to be revealed to be another, just as autobiography is simultaneously fiction and fact, drawn from both memory and the imagination. (Lynch, 2009, p. 7)

Through writing the autobiography, I realised I was not to blame for my actions and the consequences of those actions as I was only a child at the time. This helped alleviate the

survivor's guilt, which had kept me in a place of victimhood. It was possible to look at previous life events, feel the emotion, write about it, and therefore identify with the authenticity of the journey that I have embarked on in order to become whole again.

Autobiography depends upon the exposure of real human emotions and a level of involved reception of them by the reader. As a result, the confessional act continues to be important, both for those who write autobiography and for those who read it. (Lynch, 2009, p. 12)

The autobiography allowed me to realise what it was that I needed and desired. 'I knew that I did not have the capacity to think deeply about the situation. I felt so helpless and mute when it came to me' (Aldrige, 2001, p. 201) Learning to read and write was the beginning of gaining the skills needed to enable me to write my life story. At the age of 23 I had a profound dream in which I approached a being that was half-man, half- beast: "Why have you come?" he asked. "I have come to learn", I replied'. Since this time, I have had the desire to pursue my educational self. Eventually learning to read and write gave me the tools to go back and analyse the symbols, myth and legend that were evident in the dream. I began to piece together the meanings which were subconsciously being played out in my dreams. This allowed me to connect and understand the fairy-tale elements of my life and bring in the creative spirit that had been the driving force.

Fairy-tales have a useful function in contemporary society, especially for the downtrodden and marginalised. They highlight the possibility of triumphing over adversity. As its title *Golden Slippers in the Sand* (discussed below) suggests, I locate my autobiography within the Cinderella genre, as in it we see:

The generic narrative structure of an individual overcoming adversity to achieve unprecedented and unexpected personal success, for example, is equally familiar in both autobiography and the fairytale, as is the theme of a concealed identity. (Lynch, 2009, p. 7)

The rhythm and pace of the Cinderella story is slow and does not acknowledge the loss of her mother and the profound effect that has on her daily existence. Cinderella is deemed powerless as she is born of another woman and the shift in her identity and status is linked to her mother's death. The Cinderella genre particularly focuses on abandonment and rejection within a family context. Cinderella finds herself in a precarious and unhappy situation. She creates an imaginary fairy godmother who grants her three wishes: a beautiful ball gown and a coach to take her to the ball and six white horses and a coachman, but with one condition, that she has to leave by midnight or everything will return to how it was. Cinderella had a wonderful time, she met and danced with the prince and forgot about the

time until suddenly the clock struck twelve. In her desperation to get back, she loses her shoe and, leaving it behind, she hurries home.

The prince finds the shoe and, desperate to find her, declares he will marry whomever it fits. When the prince comes to the house, the stepmother desperately tries to get the shoe to fit one of her daughters. As the shoe fits Cinderella, she is transformed into a state of hopefulness by her ability to imagine and inhabit a different social existence. Similarly, writing my autobiography made me realise how fast I had lived my life, never stopping to analyse or reflect upon the events of the past. I was always moving on, taking risks, stepping out into the unknown and seeing where it would lead to without a solid imagined future.

The Cinderella genre is an apt description of the psychological condition of those downtrodden and marginalised within society and their fantasy of waiting for a prince to come and transform their lives. It is a universal story; every culture and society has its own version. It is the human aspect that allows us to identify with the story as it taps into our unconscious need to rescue and be rescued. However, it is also particularly relevant here because it is about lost childhoods in the survivor story. The prince, in my context, was the institutions and social structures of Ireland at the time. Somehow I had a fantasy that we would be fed and looked after by the institutions, a fantasy which failed to materialise. Rather, in my case, it was the survivors' movements and their autobiographical stories that crystallised for me the fact that we were caught up in a brutal patriarchal and class system. This system disempowered working-class women, and led me to the liberatory process of challenging these structures rather than internalising my pain and blaming myself. It was the writing of the autobiography that enabled me to realise that these systems were in place. The reading of the survivors' autobiographies provided the impetus to bring about the group identity, which then created agency to challenge the contemporary patriarchal structures of Irish society.

There is juxtaposition in the Cinderella story. On one hand, Cinderella wants to engage and be part of the ball, but on the other, she knows by midnight everything will return to normal; the coach will turn into a pumpkin, her ball gown will be rags again. She can live in the world she inhabits in her daily life but finds it difficult to deal with the public humiliation of being in rags. Her worry is justified as she would feel ashamed of being seen in rags at this hierarchical high society event. My autobiography was about finding the golden slippers, which symbolise both the public and private ways in which we inhabit the world. In the external world, I could be perceived as living quite a financially secure existence. However, the internal world was seeking transformation from a fragile and tenuous state to a grounded, solid internal sense of self.

The story seeks to bring the reader into internal spaces as well as the external structures of society. This is why people like the Cinderella genre; it does not just allow them to reflect upon and feel good about their own positions in life but, through empathy and connection, it also allows them to reflect on, and engage with, society's impact on the individual. They can temporarily imagine themselves in different situations that require a mammoth amount of determination to transform their own human conditioning. By

reading other people's life stories, the reader is allowed a glimpse into what it takes to grapple with profoundly painful life struggles. It allows for the possibility of hope and belief that change can come about. Examples provide others with ways of bringing change by reading autobiographical life stories. In the next section, I explore how writing is the key to unlocking the door to the internal world.

In my case, I use the art of writing and painting to bring about transformation. Autobiographical writing allows us to tap into our own need to rescue that part of the self that is damaged and needs rescuing and healing. Art is one avenue, because it is connected to the imagination, where there are possibilities to bring this healing about. Within the self, this form of art is not descriptive; there are no set rules or regulations. Autobiographical writing helps the writer to find their own voice and explore the part of the self in order to initiate the healing process. Through the writing process a person is able to link with the emotion of the scene they are writing about. 'It is not until words are written down that they become stable enough to be analysed' (Miller, 23<sup>rd</sup> August 2010 BBC Radio Four).

Writing allowed me to link chronologically, in time and space, the events of the past and to see on paper what I had experienced and think about and analyse how it had affected me. I was on a dualistic journey of internal and external struggle to understand myself. I was physically writing it and at the same time actually seeing it. Each journey is unique to the person and cannot be achieved through the confessional or therapeutic approaches, which are descriptive by nature.

### *Scriptotherapy*

To right the wrongs of the past, I knew instinctively that I had to write about them: although at the time, I did not know I was engaging in scriptotherapy. Scriptotherapy is a term proposed by Suzette Henke (1998) to signal the way in which autobiographical writing functions as a mode of self-healing. Scriptotherapy includes the process of both 'writing out and writing through traumatic experience in the mode of therapeutic re-enactment' (Smith and Watson, 2001, p. 202). Henke attends to several twentieth-century women's life narratives that focus on such childhood trauma as incest and abuse, which adult narrators – for example, Anais Nin and Sylvia Fraser – record to both heal themselves and reconfigure selves deformed by earlier abuse.

When I came across the concept of scriptotherapy, I felt very excited as I realised that this was in fact what I was seeking to do through writing: to heal and reconfigure my deformed self, which I became aware of through the writing journey of my autobiography. This was a 'light bulb' moment for me in realising that there were theories out there to describe what I was trying to achieve for myself. The day I decided to write was the day that I decided to release myself from a life sentence of frustration, isolation and loneliness. I realised that I had various deformities internally and externally. The biggest was related to

issues of trust in people and institutions (see Appendix, Image No. 2, A Godforsaken Place). I had tremendous fear around putting pen to paper, which was connected to an emotional block when it came to learning to read and write. I had found a tool to bring about self-healing because I was writing for myself and the journey I had been on. In doing so, I can now locate my autobiography within the survivor narrative (Lynch, 2009).

It took a long time for this voice to gain confidence to speak and then write about what I had felt, seen and heard from the world that I inhabited during my stay in the orphanage. This voice was extremely timid and withdrawn, trapped in a dark lonely world. For those suffering from traumatic or obsessive memories, autobiographical acts can work as therapeutic intervention. Speaking or writing about trauma becomes a process through which the narrator finds words to give voice to what was previously unspeakable (see Appendix, Image No. 6 The Coming Together: Forgiveness, Peace and Joy through the Educational Voice). And that process can be, though it is not necessarily, cathartic. Thus narrators of trauma often testify to the therapeutic effects of telling or writing a story, acknowledging how the process of writing has changed the narrator and the life story itself (Henke, 1998, p. 22-23).

Certain 'talking therapies' put constraints on the 'me' when communicating my ideas, feelings and life narratives in a way that the 'other' can understand. By contrast, scriptotherapy releases an individual by allowing dialogue between different parts of the self; the writer and the person who experienced the event written about: for example, the adult Mary who writes and the child Mary who has experienced the events. The exchange of ideas takes place in the privacy of the internal world. While one's own internal critic is present, there is no need to adjust the healing process to satisfy a third party. In this situation, the local dialect and colloquialisms can come into play again and this is why I wrote the autobiography in the present tense.

Autobiography allows one to access the internal unconscious world; this is where the whole impetus to write came from. The aim of writing the autobiography was to become whole again; it was a meditation on life in order to find peace, healing and to give encouragement to the survivor movement. By looking at the personal life story, one can bring about effective change in the self and others, hopefully at the level of public institutions, for:

Democracy cannot be successful in its mission unless the people rouse themselves to become more informed and involved, unless they unite, unless they establish an unshakable force for justice and keep a strict eye on the activities of the powerful. (Ikeda, 1999: 115)

The aim of writing the autobiography was to inform the social and political institutions that associate themselves with democracy and call themselves democratic, but which exclude the marginalised and the disempowered. The concept of democracy and people power is fruitless without the use of the 'I'; that is why we as citizens need to keep a strong focused eye on the people in positions of power who seek to deny it. The use of



autobiography is the one tool that we as survivors can use to awaken people to what has happened: autobiography is the purest form of consciousness where one is 'writing about the human condition in the first person' (Lynch, 2009, p. 29).

I would describe the whole experience of writing my life story as like having a huge psychic clean-out. I remember having a dream about a big grand house that had a basement and I went down to clear it all out, until there was nothing left except for the floorboards. Then I went outside, and was walking down towards the gate when I saw a coffin going into the morgue. I made a mental note and carried on walking, and then I found myself carrying a coffin that was made from bamboo up the driveway towards the large house, with beautiful flowers in a circular flower bed outside the main door. Between the morgue and the house were eggs, some intact and some broken. Somehow I feel this dream is connected to the deaths of my mother and sister and new beginnings. The dream showed me that I was ready to go into the basement, the deep psyche of my own self and to start to make sense of my life. This is what I have done since 29<sup>th</sup> October 2005, when I started to write my autobiography.

#### *Ethical implications of writing autobiographically*

When starting to write my life experience my intention was to bring about healing on a personal level. However, I had not considered the complexity that this would entail for other members of my family: that what might be a healing process for me might cause distress for members of my family and that my truth would make them and others uncomfortable. Eakin suggests that 'truthfulness requires betrayal' (Eakin, 2004). This is almost the autobiographer's credo: better to push the envelope, bring the dark into the light, than to conceal. As an autobiographical writer, one has to acknowledge the notion of 'betrayal' when considering ethical issues (Eakin, 2004, p. 152). This resonates with how I felt about my time in the orphanage. I wanted to tell my truth, and in doing so, I knew I had to betray my so-called carers and the systems involved. Eakin further suggests that, 'The myth of autonomy dies hard, and autobiography criticism has not yet fully addressed the extent to which the self is defined by – and lives in terms of – its relations with others' (Eakin, 2004, p. 43). He also argues that 'we live, relational lives. We belong to various groups in society members of families extend family groups that is made up of different cultural influences' (Eakin, 2004, p. 43).

Writing about one's life may appear to be simple, yet it proves to be extremely complex. What starts off as a journey of self-exploration can turn into a questioning of the self and self-experience. Is writing the story edifying and heroic or merely a fatal misguidance? Is the desire to write memoirs a trading of the author's flesh? And at what cost to others, children, friends and society? Cynthia Crossen (4 Mar 1997), in her review of

Harrison's 'The Kiss', purports that the autobiographer's desire to confess, however therapeutic, may indeed come at a cost to those close to them or to wider society, 'Their children, their friends, perhaps society itself may pay a terrible price for the writer's solace'. For me, this resonates with my own feelings and thoughts about how I may have abused others by writing my truth. In particular, in writing about my husband, Pino's, failings in relation to me and our children, I did not consider how this would affect others in my life and did not make a connection between the writing and the consequences. Is the act of life writing, in a sense, abusive? I felt that I needed to speak out and that my story would not have the same impact if told by a ghostwriter who deals with autobiographical stories. Autobiography is the most enlightening form in which we can make sense of and comprehend life and all its anomalies. This implies that we are always closest to ourselves and that self-representation is the most credible form of empirical representation. Having lived the experience, I felt I was able to fully engage with the content, particularly with the trauma and adversity within a social and political context. I realise that there could be an almost unconscious resistance to engaging with this kind of material by others as it may be uncomfortable to confront someone else's reality in a similar context.

What might be acceptable in contemporary British society may not find the same acceptance in Irish or Italian societies. Reading about another's culture may seem fine from a distance, but reading about our own culture may instil discomfort. It is fair to say that autobiography can be anonymous. By changing the content into auto-fiction and altering names and places, we make it less personal, but then it is no longer an autobiography. This brings up the question of my voice and being silenced once again. I struggled with the ethical issues when considering whether or not to publish my autobiography. I gave copies to three family members in order to gauge their reaction to writing such a private and emotional account of my life. Part of me, however, wondered whose story I was telling and why I needed consent from others. Did I think that I needed the approval of family members who might feel affected by our story being made public?

Research on ethical issues has helped me to consider the impact of revealing very intimate details of my private life to both my immediate and extended family members. One comment that I received referring to a part of the autobiography that related to them was, 'I don't mind our relations been used for your educational development, but I have reservations about it been out in the public domain for public consumption'.

I can understand that it is very hard when one is confronted with another person's take on a relational self and the life they shared. I can appreciate this may be very shocking and understand the sense of betrayal. Ok, so how do we reconcile this personally, politically and ethically? What enables us to write stories of others' lives?

## Conclusion

This paper began by looking at autobiographical writing and the different styles and genres within it, contextualising my own undertaking as a project of self-expression. Important to this process was the weaving together of various strands that help to put a life into context. Academic styles were compared to therapeutic styles and scriptotherapy was found to be informative as a self-healing tool. Central to this process was the exploration of the feminist perspective, which allowed an insight into the conditioning of women by a patriarchal society, and into the Irish system operating in 1960s Dublin in particular.

The three different styles examined, autobiographical, therapeutic and academic, could be described as a toxic mix because individually they are aimed at different audiences. This has proved to be difficult in trying to tell a personal account in an academic style whilst trying to remain true to the personal narrative and all its integral parts.

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### *Bio*

I grew up in Dublin in the 1960's, in extreme poverty and hardship I was placed into the care of St. Joseph's Institute in Drumcondra. This was an orphanage where I experienced cruelty and trauma that would set me on a lifelong mission to seek answers, understanding and eventually my own recovery. Living in Dagenham, and still illiterate at 37 years old, I embarked on an 17 year educational journey which would culminate in writing my autobiography ( *Golden Slippers in the Sand* ) and completing my PhD nstitutional abuse in Ireland: Survival, Redress and Recovery at The University of East London in 2014.

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## *Femina Academica: Women Leaders in the Changing Italian Academia*

Emanuela Spano

### *Introduction*

This paper is part of the theoretical work carried out for my overall PhD project about the self-narrations of women leaders in the in the specific context of one of the largest university of the South of Italy – the University of Naples, Federico II – traditionally considered as a classical example of a ‘Mediterranean’ model of governance. In recent years this context – as the wider Italian HE system – experimented new governance approaches that are trying to emulate numerous components of the British New Public Management reforms (Moscati 2001, 118). Despite this tentative of translation, the Italian university governance model – and the Napoli’s Federico II as well – still remains rooted in its bureaucratic-oligarchic and professional tradition (Clark 1983), creating a ‘paradoxical space’ (Tamboukou 2000), where the female self is attempting to negotiate the contradictions, and the tensions arising from this process of change. Furthermore this change could be seen as ‘incomplete’, trying to resist neo-liberal pressures and discourses of managerialism from a professional governance legacy.

Starting from these premises and considering that there are several ways in which every self-narrative could be interpreted, I will focus on the way in which women leaders use (discursive circulating) stories to interpret their life and, more specifically, their networks of relations within the university and its culture. Notwithstanding, I am not using here narratives to indicate ‘stories’ that simply carry matters as ‘facts’. Rather, I conceptualise narratives as *social products* discursively constructed by people within the context of specific social, historical and cultural locations.

For this reason, I adopt the definitions of *emplotment* and *narrative identity* elaborated by Paul Ricoeur who, in fact, has considered the self as profoundly social, and always-already interpreted. For Ricoeur, every narrative must contain transformation (change over time), plot line and characters. But these components must be brought together within an overall plot. Plots are not selected a priori, but are produced through the process of *emplotment*. The author defines this process as a ‘synthesis of heterogeneous elements’ (Ricoeur 1991a, 21), that is to say, a structure that makes sense of the events. Through this process of *emplotment*, social actors constitute a life and in the process, constitute an identity. In this sense, for Ricoeur, identity is not a pre-given entity on to which narratives structures are (more or less violently) imposed. Rather, the very constitution of an identity is configured over time and through narrative (*narrative identity*).

Therefore, it is possible to affirm that stories produced by individual social actors would have no ‘plot’ if they did not accord, however obliquely, with broader social narratives. Paul Ricoeur argues that the kinds of social narratives on which people draw to frame their personal narratives are largely those of the literary tradition. However, this perspective tends to underplay the workings of power relations in the social world. For this reason, I also affirm the necessity of adopting a Foucaultian formulation of those ‘public narratives’, expressed in terms of ‘discourses’ – ‘the domains of subconscious knowledge’ (Foucault 1974, 25) that constraint or enable, writing, speaking, and thinking, or the conditions under which certain statements are considered to be the truth - in order to avoid what one could define a ‘power bias’ in the conceptualisation of individual narratives.

### *Using narratives: a case study*

Narrative interviews offer a means of exploring the ways in which social actors interpret the world, and their place within it. These interpretations are often extremely complex and nuanced. This paper is about the way in which such interpretations can be conceptualised, starting from one narrative I collected in my PhD research project about how women make sense of their professional lives as academic leaders, as well as the everyday ambiguities, complexities and dilemmas they encounter<sup>21</sup>.

Narratives could be conceived as an interpretative lens, through which people represent their identities - both to themselves and to others - as well as their work worlds thorough the connection between events, recalls and meanings (Fitzgerald 2014). Thus, they do not originate with the individual: rather, they circulate culturally to provide a repertoire – a limited one – from which people can produce their own stories. They can be conceptualised as artefacts through which institutional culture can be framed, understood and interpreted and their dominant values and norms identified (Gherardi and Poggio 2007).

More generally, my argument here is that, not only people often produce storied accounts of themselves and of their relation to the social world but also the social world is itself ‘storied’.

<sup>21</sup> The research project – although unfinished – involve 20 women. All of them occupy senior positions as deans but 12 are in the specific context of one of the largest university of the South of Italy - the University of Naples, Federico II - while 8 are in the UK academy. Biographical narrations have been undertaken to explore women’s self-representations, experiences and everyday realities of leadership. All interviews have been recorded and transcribed. Transcripts have been subject to a process of analysis – still in progress – designed to maximising understanding of the specificities of women’s leadership lives. Thus, through interpretative analysis transcripts have been read to discover tentative categories as heuristic devices. Each interview has been abstracted and indexed according to themes developed through extensive literature reviews.

As Steph Lawler points out, ‘stories circulate culturally, providing a meaning of making sense of that world, and also providing the materials with which people construct personal narratives as a means of constructing personal identities’ (Lawler 2002, 242). In this sense, one could affirm that narratives are central means with which people inter-connect past and present, self and others. They do so within the context of discourses that delimit what can be said, what stories can be told, defining ‘*what* constitutes an appropriate or successful narrative’ (Ewick and Silbey 1995, 207) and – adopting a Foucaultian perspective – who speaks, from where and in what way, that is what renders statements possible (Ball 2013).

From this perspective, it is not that ‘the facts do not matter’, nor it is the case that ‘*only* facts matters’. Rather, facts (or experience) and the interpretation of those facts (or that experience) are envisaged and necessarily entwined: ‘a narrative of an individual history is placed in a narrative of social history – be it a family or a nation – or even in a history of the narrative’ (Czarniawska 2004, 5).

As already outlined, to extend my definition of narrative I am following the work of Paul Ricoeur who, has considered narrative as a category by which people make their own identity. Building on his argument, I argue that identity is not isolated from the social world: rather, is in intimately bound up with the social world. More specifically, narrative must contain transformation, plot lines, and characters. Anyway these components should be brought together within an overall plot. For Ricoeur, the central element of a narrative is its plot. Plots are not selected a priori, but are produced through the process of emplotment. The author defines this process as a ‘synthesis of heterogeneous elements’ (Ricoeur 1991a, 21), that is to say, a structure that makes sense of the events.

In this sense, it is emplotment, which makes an account a narrative, which turns disparate events into ‘episodes’ (Somers and Gibson 1994) having a part in the beginning, the end and the movement of a plot. Conversely, it is the absence of emplotment, which means that archives, questions, and answers, for example, are not narratives. In fact, these forms do not incorporate the important element of time, in which time passing structures the narrative and earlier events are seen to cause later ones. Starting from these premises, a narrative must have a turning-point: as Ricoeur (1980) has highlighted, the question every narrator tries to fend off is, ‘So what?’

How can individual narratives be related to discursive ones? To understand a society or some part of a society, it is important to discover the repertoire of legitimate stories and find out how it evolved – this is what Czarniawska (2004) calls a ‘history of narratives’. I want to try to make this issue more concrete by introducing a fragment of a life story interview I collected for my thesis<sup>22</sup>. Considering that there are several ways in which this narrative could be interpreted, I will focus on the issue of interpretation – the way in which an academic ‘leader’ uses (discursively circulating) stories to interpret her life and, more specifically, her embeddedness within the university and its culture. I will scrutinize ‘what’ is recounted, as well as ‘how’ this specific woman imposes meaning on events, actions and individuals in her narrative to show sequentiality and causality when she started to travel into and around a male world (Bryans and Mavin 2003).

In the specific context of the University Federico II I have already described, the research project – although unfinished – is based on the biographical narrations of 8 women, all occupying senior positions as deans. Among those I chose a fragment of the ‘story’ narrated by Rossana. She is the Director of the Department of Psychology, and considers her professional trajectory as strongly connected to her ‘political training’. It would be impossible to read off Rossana’s own (narrativized) identity simply from the curricular description of her carrier – a self-

<sup>22</sup> The interview is taken from my PhD research project.



narration's 'genre' that has been very often adopted also for other interviews I collected for my research project.

This is part of Rossana's account of the 'rise and fall' of her academic experience:

**Rossana:** *I chose to study psychology but what was this? I chose it because I was independent, leftist, I didn't join the PC (Italian Communist Party) that I criticized, even if I deeply respected many of its exponents, I also fought with many of them (laughs) and, above all, I was a feminist because during the Seventies I immediately became involved with the feminist movement...My ideal was to learn psychoanalysis to bring it into the social sphere, to help people who cannot afford it...I have never given up this ideal, for sure! (...)*

*My master was G. I. who instilled me this passion for psychoanalysis, my passion for the social dimension of the analytical therapy...He was unique! A very refined intellectual, as it is impossible to find nowadays (...)* I have been really lucky because I had the opportunity of knowing another era, an era of extraordinary masters!

*Now I realise I devoted my entire life to university and if I have to be honest, a university which has gradually disappeared...an institution which now I would definitely avoid because it has nothing to do with culture and research...I feel we are dominated by a new form of imperialism, an imperialism of idiots and of 'pro-Americans'... I have never considered USA an especially cultured country in contrast with Europe, but with the new standards system if you don't publish in American journals you are nobody! We are completely clearing, as communists did at the time when they made their turn, an invaluable psychoanalytical heritage to hit off the American theories and researches...Their researches are not better than ours, of what we produced in the last period...for this reason, all this restructuring...I will retire in 3 years, I will be really happy!*

As I argued above, there are several ways – indefinite but not infinite (Eco 1992) – in which this extract could be interpreted: Rossana's words could, for example, be seen as 'nostalgic' purveyors of some prior truth. Alternatively, her post-hoc version of events could be seen as 'biasing' her account, making it one characterised by *untruth*. Yet, for me at least, what is more interesting, is the issue of interpretation – the ways in which Rossana uses (discursively circulating) stories to interpret her life. For example, she mentioned a lot of 'public narratives' discursively circulating in a specific historical period and shared by a specific generation of women - the feminist movement, the conflicting relationship with the moderate political position of the Communist Party etc... – and she constructs a story around them.

In this respect, it is possible to consider some different arguments. Firstly, though very brief, the abstract has the components of a narrative: it has transformation (change over time), as Rossana's professional identity and motivation towards her ideals have been unfortunately turned into disillusion and defeat. Action and characters are minimal, but nevertheless present. And a range of various elements are brought together within an overall plot – one that, as we will see, centres on the (incomplete) restructuring of university and the disappearance of an 'era'. The plot incorporates Ricoeur's concept of synthesis, as it synthesizes many disparate events (the feminist experience, the relationship with her master, the transformation of the Italian university) into an overall story, one totality (the transformation of the Italian university and its culture). It does this within a synthesis between some events and one story, so that Rossana's political and cultural past experiences, for example, contribute to the coherence and intelligibility of her narrative.

Secondly, from this brief extract, it is also possible to notice that Rossana is producing this narrative, not from the past, but out of the present. She is interpreting her past in the light of what she knows, through the lens of social reconstructions, and using this 'cultural mediation' to formulate present and future life stories. As Fitzgerald argues, 'stories have always some relation to the meaning attached to the past and are more a reflection of this meaning than a reflection of past reality' (Fitzgerald 2014, 16). Indeed, earlier events gain significance only through events that come later. In fact, through narrative Rossana is able to constitute a more or less coherent self: a

‘defeated’ and ‘nostalgic’ self in our case. The movement of the plot leads to her becoming what she is. Hence, as Ricoeur would say, ‘the end is read into the beginning and the beginning into the end’ (Ricoeur 1980, 183), as Rossana narrates an identity that is stable across time. Emplotment brings together past and present events (what is understood to be) a logical, coherent, and meaningful overall ‘story’. It provides a means of conceptualising people in the context of history: if the past is always interpreted through the present, then equally, this (interpreted) past informs the present.

Moreover, Rossana’s narrative illustrates the link between personal and public narratives. Her story is coherent precisely because it resonates with broader public narratives and symbolic systems. As I already noticed, she mentioned a lot of ‘public narratives’ discursively circulating in a specific historical period and shared by a specific generation of women - the feminist movement, the conflicting relationship with the moderate political position of the Communist Party, what she calls the ‘era of extraordinary masters’, the ‘mission’ to bring psychoanalytical instruments into the social – and constructs a story around them.

In fact, the story she constructs is one about a cultural heritage which has been deleted from a new imperialism of ‘idiots and pro-Americans’ and, more specifically, about a university which is clearing its excellence to conform to the neoliberal standards. She is able to use these narratives because she inhabits a culture in which stories are saturated with historical, gendered and classed meanings. Her individual story is narrated within a collective set of meanings. In other words, the symbolic meaning of these narratives does not originate with Rossana: rather, they circulate culturally to signify a particular historical period, and the shared memory of a specific generation of women.

### *Avoiding the ‘power bias’*

It is possible to affirm that stories produced by individual social actors would have no ‘plot’ if they did not accord, however obliquely, with broader social narratives. More specifically, narratives link together individual and collective in two ways: a) narratives of individual lives always incorporate other life narratives, hence immediately exploding the myth of the ‘atomized individual’; b) narratives are not only produced by individuals, but also circulate socially. Somers and Gibson refer to such narratives as ‘public narratives’: ‘narratives which are attached to cultural and institutional formation rather than the single individual’ (Somers and Gibson 1994, 62).

These ‘public narratives’, for example, include stories produced to explain the rise of disciplinary frameworks (Myers 1990), or stories produced within and about legal frameworks (Ewick and Silbey 1995). Paul Ricoeur argues that the kinds of public narratives on which people draw to frame their personal narratives are largely those of the literary tradition. However, this perspective tends to underplay the workings of power relations in the social world: it is important to stress that public narratives are powerful in structuring the kind of things, which can be said. For this reason, I affirm the necessity of adopting a Foucaultian formulation of those ‘public narratives’, expressed in terms of ‘discourses’, in order to avoid what one could define a ‘power bias’ in the conceptualisation of individual narratives.

Meanwhile Foucault so often uses the term ‘discourse’ in different ways in his work, most pertinently he was concerned ‘to address the rules and the structures that constitute a discourse rather than the texts and utterances produced within it’ (Ball 2013, 19). For Foucault discourse is not present in the object, but ‘enables it to appear’. It is the condition under which certain statements are considered to be the truth. Discourse is that which constraints or enables, writing,

speaking, and thinking. He once referred to discourse as ‘the domain of subconscious knowledge’ and defined it as:

Secretly based on an ‘already said’; and that this ‘already said’ is not merely a phrase that has been already spoken, or a text that has been written, but a ‘never said’, an incorporeal discourse, a voice silent as a breath, a writing that is merely the hollow of its own mark (Foucault 1974, 25).

In this sense, statements create persons: ‘we do not speak discourse, discourses speak us’ (Ball 2013, 20). They produce the objects about which they speak. Foucault goes on to say:

Of course, discourses are composed of signs; but what they do is more than use these signs to designate things. It is more that renders them irreducible to the language (langue) and to speech. It is this ‘more’ that we must reveal and describe (Foucault 1974, 49).

We can conceptualise this ‘more’ in a variety of ways; on the one hand, Foucault reflects on the procedures, which constrain discourse and its production – forms of exclusion – while on the other we spoke of the ‘ponderous, formidable materiality’ (Foucault 1981, 52). The former takes account of what the ‘public narratives’ do not, that is to say the wider context in which words are uttered – who speaks, from where and in what way, that is what renders statements possible.

In fact, the operation of the discursive formations is to make it virtually impossible to think outside of them. The discursive rules that produce and define reason are linked to the exercise of power. The materiality of discourse also draws attention to configurations, organisations, practices, subjects and subjectivities – including the author (we could even say the ‘plot’) – as manifestations of this discourse, and again, underline the misunderstanding involved in reducing discourse to language, or – in the case of Ricoeur – to literary ‘genres’.

The point that the definition of public narratives as literary genres do not grasp is that they become ‘truths’ through their relation to an *episteme*, a regime of truth which provides the unconscious codes and rules or holistic conceptual frameworks, ‘that define problematics and their potential resolutions and constitute views of the world comprising the most fundamental of identificatory and explanatory notions such as the nature of causality in a given range of phenomena’ (Prado 1995, 26).

For this reason, in the individual narratives the voice of the story-teller often tries to obscure the link with this ‘organising discourses’ through narrative’s use of the inclusive voice of the story-teller, rather than the voice of what Foucault defines as the ‘authorities of delimitations’ (Foucault 1974). Hence, as Lawler suggests, “we” can be drawn in to the story, using this framework, as a schema of self-understanding’ (Lawler 2002, 252).

If it is undoubtedly true that the notion of ‘discourse’ and Foucault’s insistence on the ‘relations of power’ seem to deny any possibility of freedom for the ‘discursively trapped’ subject, it is important to remember that for the author ‘there cannot be relations of power unless the subjects are free’ (Foucault 1981, 12). For this reason like power itself, resistance is also manifold and operates at a multiplicity of points in different forms, in many small acts and passing moments, with different purposes and possibilities – what the author calls ‘attacks upon a technique, a form of power’ (Foucault 1982, 212). In his perspective these ‘attacks’ can emerge through what he calls the *technologies of the self*, that is to say the mechanisms through which human beings ‘act upon themselves’ at the very time of their objectification (Foucault 1988, 18). Among those technologies he mentioned the ‘techniques of verbalisation’ as a way of constituting, positively, a new self:

From the eighteenth century to the present, the techniques of verbalisation have been reinserted by the so-called human sciences in order to use them without renunciation of the self but to constitute, positively, a new self. To use these techniques without renouncing oneself constitutes a decisive break (Foucault 1988, 48).

Following this perspective, interview accounts can be conceptualised in terms of (co-produced) techniques of verbalisation and be interpreted in order to show the processes, procedures, and apparatuses whereby truth, power, knowledge and desire are interrelated in their production and in their effect on the wider context. Going back to Rossana's narrative this means that her account could also be seen as a space of 'local' resistance against the dominant and conflicting discourses about women leaders in Higher Education which could create conditions of possibility for 'unruly subjects' to emerge (Tamboukou 2003, 34-35) and for a 'critical ontology of the self' to be formulated (McNay 1994).

In conclusion, even if Foucault has probably never been interested in 'speaking subjects' per se but in how 'human beings are made subjects' (Foucault 1982, 208) – maybe except in his last period which Dews (1989) has seen as a 'late return to the subject' – he permits a more complex and critical understanding of the influence of power in producing reality and the narratives accounts that are themselves nested within these power relations which are always validated in a more or less coherent systems of knowledge. He permits to go beyond a conceptualisation of individual accounts in terms of literary 'genres' highlighting the role of power in legitimising some discourses and self-narration - while excluding others - and at the same time affirming the intrinsic freedom of human beings which emerges in the recognition of the historicity of truth.

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*Bio:*

**Emanuela Spanò** is a PhD student at the Department of Social Sciences, University of Naples Federico II, Naples, Ital and a visiting research student at the Centre for Narrative Research at UEL. Her current interests of research concern gender patterns and identity building in the Academia field, biographical research, and the intersection of individual biography and society.

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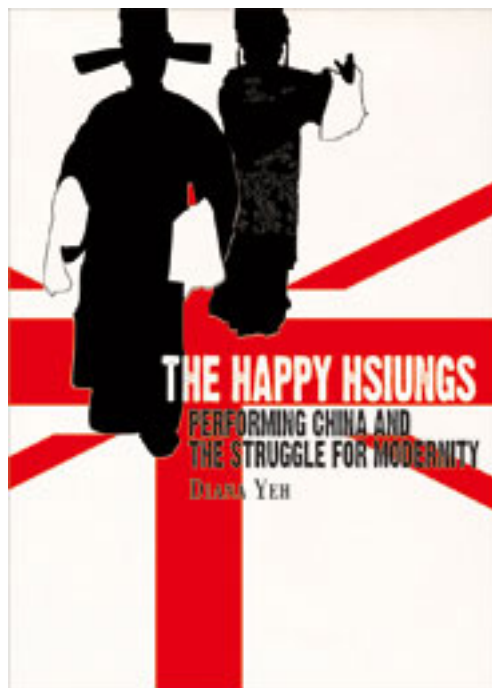
Publication news from UEL PhD students  
and PhD Alumni and Alumnae:

2013-2014

a) Books and Edited Collections

**The Happy Hsiungs:  
Performing China and the Struggle for Modernity**

By Diana Yeh



July, 2014  
Paper, 160 pages, 0  
ISBN: 978-988-8208-17-3  
Hong Kong University Press

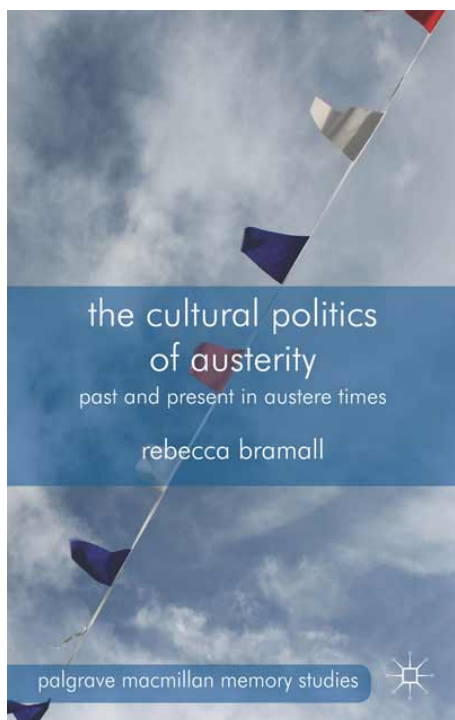
*The Happy Hsiungs* recovers the histories of two married Chinese writers who lived and worked in Britain from the 1930s onwards. Shih-I Hsiung shot to worldwide fame with his play “Lady Precious Stream,” while Dymia Hsiung was the first Chinese woman to publish a fictional autobiography in English of her life in Britain. Diana Yeh recounts the Hsiungs’ childhoods in turn-of-the-century China, their youth in the radical May 4 era, and their lives in Britain and the United States, showing how they “performed” identities conforming to modern Western ideals of gender, sexuality, and Chineseness.

Dr Diana Yeh is Senior Lecturer in Sociology at the University of Winchester and has also lectured at Birkbeck College, University of London and at the University of East London. Formerly Sociological Review Fellow, she is currently a Research Fellow on the AHRC-funded project, *China in Britain: Myths and Realities*. She received her PhD in 2010 for the thesis *Re-imagining (British)-Chineseness: The Politics and Poetics of Art and Migration in Diaspora Space*, Director of Studies, Prof. Nira Yuval-Davis.

# The Cultural Politics of Austerity

## *Past and Present in Austere Times*

By Rebecca Bramall



In the wake of the global financial crisis, the present 'age of austerity' has repeatedly been compared to the wartime and postwar austerity years. For many, the rise of austerity nostalgia suggests a compliant public in thrall to the command to 'keep calm and carry on' while the welfare state is dismantled around them. Yet, at the same time, the idea that the Second World War can serve as a compelling historical precedent for sustainable living has found favour in environmental and anti-consumerist debate. Challenging dominant approaches to 'austerity', Rebecca Bramall explores the presence and persuasiveness of the past in contemporary popular culture, focusing intensively on the contradictions, antagonisms, alternatives and possibilities that the current conjuncture presents. In doing so, she exemplifies a new approach to emergent uses of the past, questioning longstanding assumptions about the relationship between history, culture and politics.

October, 2013

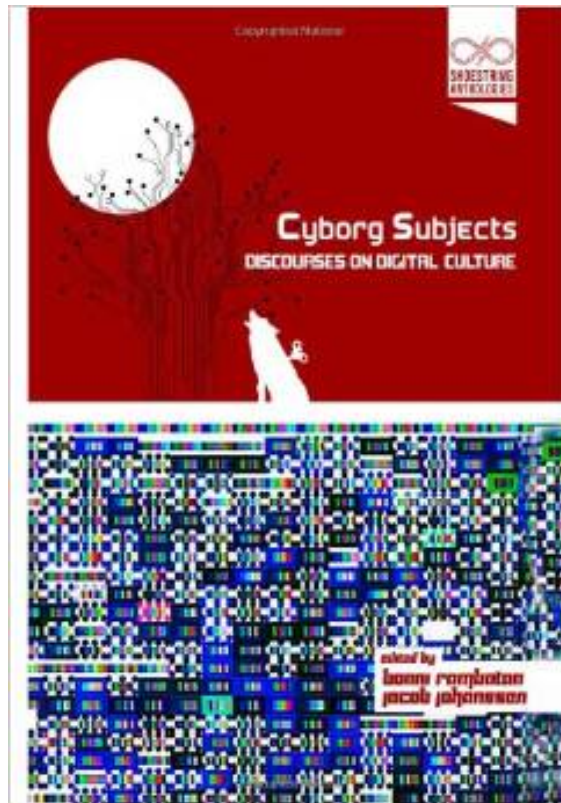
ISBN: 9780230360471

Dr Rebecca Bramall is a Senior Lecturer in Media Studies in the College of Arts and Humanities, University of Brighton. Her research interests lie in cultural theory, popular culture, intersections of culture and economy, and twentieth-century history. She gained AHRC funding for doctoral work at the University of East London, where she completed her PhD thesis in 2007 'On cultural amnesia : critical theory and contemporary discourses of forgetting', Directoc of studies Prof. Susannah Radstone.



# Cyborg Subjects: Discourses on Digital Culture (Shoestring Anthologies)

by Jacob Johanssen and Bonni Rambatan (Editors)



This book is an interrogation of humanity's new potentials and threats brought by technology when the question of social change is becoming more crucial than ever. Collected in the course of 2010-2012, the selected essays in this anthology confront questions from a wide-ranging perspective that evoke the postmodern idea of the cyborg to illuminate recent phenomena from global warming, Wikileaks, to the Occupy movements. Multiple disciplines from music to psychoanalysis to journalism to anthropology collaborate to examine the way we shape the world from behind our ubiquitous screens to taking to the streets in mass protests.

What does the increasing omnipotence of networked machines ultimately mean?  
What do social networks do to our sense of self, others and society?

Does P2P technology foster new ethics and spiritualities? What potentials does posthumanity have to bring about social change?

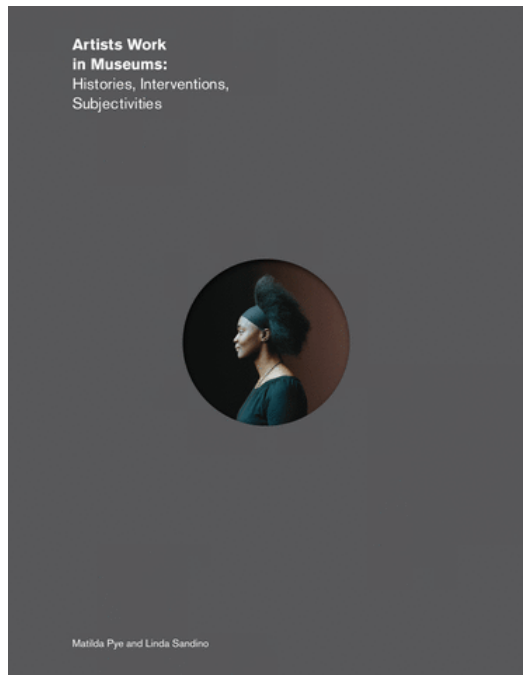
Paperback, October 2013  
CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform  
**ISBN-10:** 1491271515  
**ISBN-13:** 978-1491271513

Jacob Johanssen is a PhD student in the School of Social Sciences at the University of East London. His research interests include psychosocial studies, digital culture, critical theory, psychoanalysis and media as well as audience research. His PhD thesis explores a psychoanalytic conception of the human subject that is both theoretical and epistemological. The research involves interviews with viewers of the television programme 'Embarrassing Bodies' and explores their investments, fantasies and viewing practices. Director of studies, Dr Candida Yates.



# Artists Work in Museums:

## Histories Interventions Subjectivities



by Sandino, Linda and Pye,  
Matilda and Saumarez Smith, Charles and Avery  
Quash, Susanna and Marsden,  
Christopher and Timmers,  
Margaret and Cummings, Neil and Fleming,  
Martha and Storrie, Calum and Ahl,  
Zandra and Harrison, Keith and Atha,  
Christine and Greenhalgh, Paul

Wunderkammer Press, Bath Spa University  
ISBN 978-0-9566462-8-6

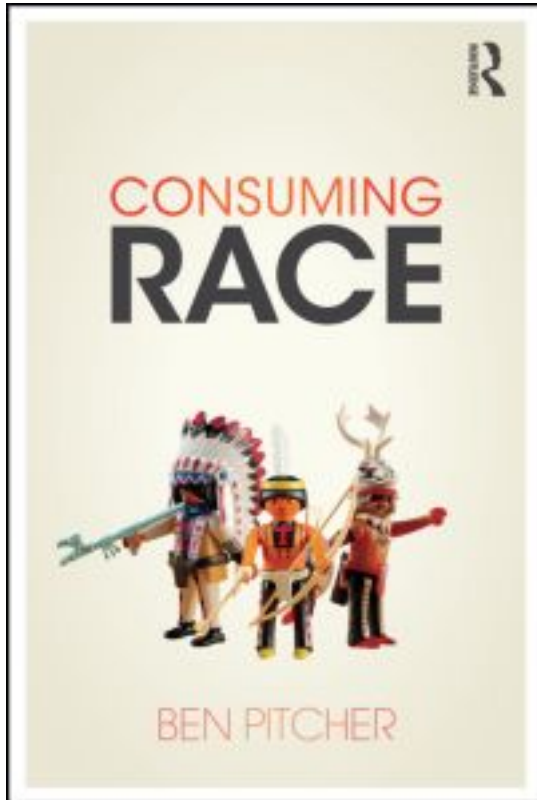
2013

*Artists Work in Museums: histories interventions and subjectivities* brings together artists, historians and museum professionals to explore the history and contribution of artists working in museums as members of staff. It examines how the museum has functioned as a specific site of cultural production and subjective engagement for artists and designers in their role as directors, curators, project managers, and educators. Drawing on specific case studies and interviews, the essays document the historically contingent, problematic character of the artist museum professional, and his/her agency within the museum system.

Dr Linda Sandino is the CCW/V&A Senior Research Fellow in oral history at the Victoria & Albert Museum Research department, where she is a member of the post-1900 expertise group. At Camberwell College of Arts, she developed the oral history collection and resource, *Voices in the Visual Arts [VIVA]*. She has undertaken a substantial number of recordings with architects, craftspeople, designers, and painters for The British Library Sound Archive. She received her PhD in 2010 for the thesis 'Life History Narratives in the applied arts' the University of East London (UEL), Director of Studies, Prof. Molly Andrews.

# Consuming Race

By Ben Pitcher



Routledge – April, 2014

**Paperback:**

978-0-415-51969-4

**Hardback:**

978-0-415-51968-7

From the rise of Nordic noir to a taste for street food, from practices of natural gardening to the aesthetics of children's TV, contemporary culture is saturated with racial meanings. By consuming race we make sense of other groups and cultures, communicate our own identities, express our needs and desires, and discover new ways of thinking and being.

This book explores how the meanings of race are made and remade in acts of creative consumption. Ranging across the terrain of popular culture, and finding race in some unusual and unexpected places, it offers fresh and innovative ways of thinking about the centrality of race to our lives.

*Consuming Race* provides an accessible and highly readable overview of the latest research and a detailed reading of a diverse range of objects, sites and practices. It gives students of sociology, media and cultural studies the opportunity to make connections between academic debates and their own everyday practices of consumption.

**Dr Ben Pitcher** is Senior Lecturer in Sociology at the University of Westminster, London. He has written extensively on race and racism, and in the area of cultural studies. He is the author of *The Politics of Multiculturalism* (Palgrave 2009), based on his PhD thesis 'Multicultural Nationalism : New Labour and the Politics of Race and State', which he received from UEL in 2007, Director of Studies, Prof. Mica Nava.

# Retro Style: Class, Gender and Design in the Home

by Sarah Elsie Baker



Bloomsbury, September 2013

**ISBN-10:** 085785108X

**ISBN-13:** 978-0857851086

Retro interiors have come to the fore in recent years as a highly desirable and valuable branch of interior design. The emergence of a need for decorative objects and vintage furniture has resurrected retro style and placed it firmly as a key trend of contemporary design.

Retro Style: Class, Gender and Design in the Home is the first book to explore the modern position of retro by asking important questions around the emergence of the trend, its impact on production and consumption and how it manifests itself in the

contemporary interior. Examining themes ranging from design, taste and the aestheticisation of everyday life to the bohemianisation of popular culture, the book provides a fascinating insight into how retro has shaped modern interior design.

Using original ethnographic research from retro retailers, enthusiasts, designers and media professionals Retro Style explores the positive and negative side of the style, ultimately providing an original and thought-provoking perspective on the history and trajectory of how retro has become what it now is and its bearing on the future of designed interiors.

Dr Sarah Elsie Baker is a Lecturer in Design, Culture and Context at Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand. She received her PhD from UEL in 2010 for the thesis 'Retro style, class and the home: the making and unmaking of value, Director of studies, Prof. Mica Nava.

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